

WILLIAM BLAKE

His Life Character and Genius

BY

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"The nature of my work is visionary—an endeavour
to restore the Golden Age."



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PREFACE

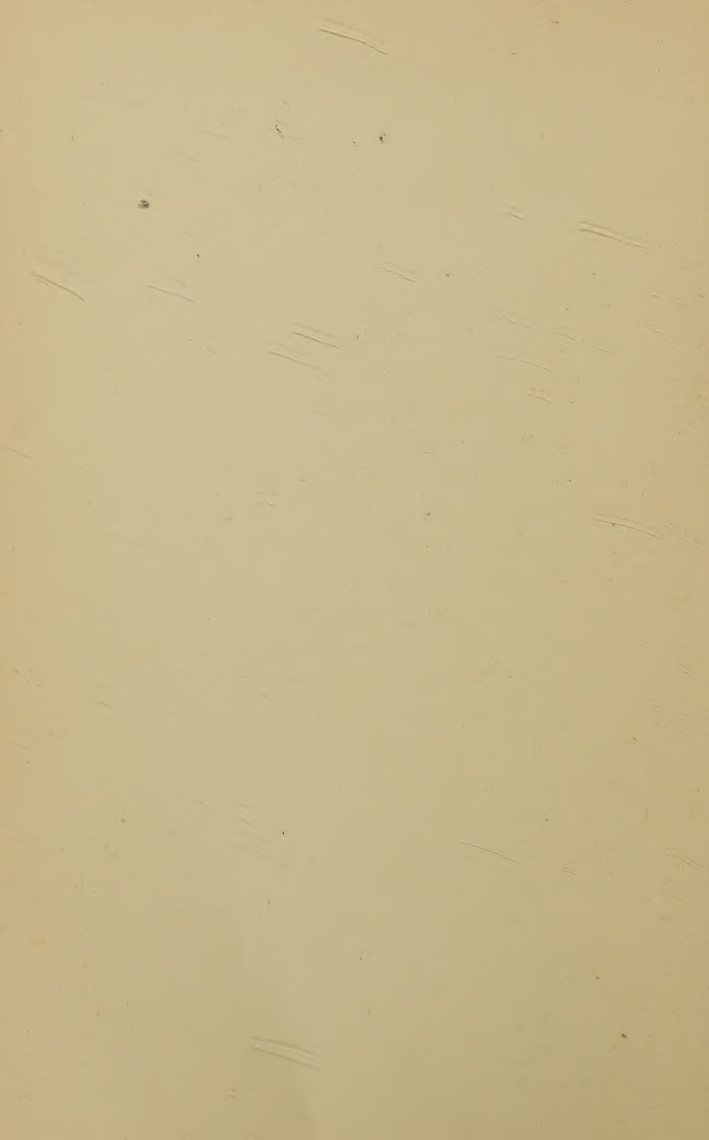
AFTER the greater part of this work was written, I learned through a friend of the existence of two ladies, daughters of William John Blake, of Southampton, who claim to be second cousins of William Blake, the subject of this work. Their father always spoke of the poet and artist as his near kinsman, and his widow left a document in which she traces the family back, through Admiral Blake, to a remote period of English history. This William John Blake was the son of a William Blake, whose father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were John Blakes.

The family was originally settled in Somersetshire, to which county Admiral Blake belonged; but one branch of it subsequently migrated to Wilts, and it was from this branch that the poet was descended. In a work on Blake's art, upon which I am now engaged I propose to give as full details of the pedigree as can be obtained.

The portrait of Blake given as frontispiece is a photographic reproduction of the miniature from the life by John Linnell.

ALFRED T. STORY.

HEATON CHAPEL,
LANCASHIRE,



A TOI, ESPRIT PUR,
QUI PLANE SUR MON HORIZON,
LOIN ET PALE,
MAIS TOUJOURS ME POUSSANT
VERS UN NOUVEL ESSOR
PAR
TON INSPIRATION SAINES ET GRANDE—
A TOI
CET OUVRAGE
EST
HUMBLEMENT DEDIE.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

I.

IT is now well on to seventy years since that strange and almost inexplicable genius, William Blake, died and found obscure burial in Bunhill Fields; and though his fame has been gradually growing since that time to the present, the world is still undecided as to his rightful place in the realm of art and letters, and likewise as to the message he had to deliver to the generations, even if what he had to deliver can be dignified by the name of message at all, which some deny.

Blake died in August, 1827, at the age of sixty-nine, having been born in 1757, amid the gloom of a London November. His father, James Blake, a descendant of the Blakes of Somersetshire—the same family which produced Admiral Blake—was a hosier, and carried on business at No. 28 Broad Street, near Golden Square, a district which was at that time much more “respectable,” not to say fashionable, than it is now. According to all accounts, the hosier was in a

fairly prosperous way of business, and was, as regards religious belief, a Dissenter. William was the second child of a family of five. The first-born, John, is said to have been the favourite of his parents, but he turned out badly, and finally joined the army. After William came James and Robert, and a sister, of all of whom mention will again have to be made.

Of Blake's father we know little beyond the fact that he was of a religious turn, well conducted and respectable, and that he was a somewhat severe disciplinarian. As regards his mother, Catherine by name, we know still less, and the records have hardly a word concerning her, though we imagine that, looking at the mingled emotional and spiritual of her son's lineaments, we behold the feminine soul of the woman who bore him looking at us through his eyes. There can be no doubt that he took largely after his mother, and that from her, in especial, he inherited the more sympathetic and imaginative side of his nature.

Of education, in the scholastic sense, Blake received but little ; in all probability it was confined to reading, writing and arithmetic, and not much of the latter. The faculty for figures was not a strong one with him, and he never attained much proficiency therein ; in short, his schooling consisted of the merest rudiments of learning : what other education he got was either the result of home influence and training, or of personal effort. That the atmosphere of his home must have been actively intellectual as well as religious we cannot doubt ; the whole of his subsequent life attests the fact.

We are told that he began to use his pencil very early, and that he soon showed great proficiency in drawing. Allan Cunningham, his first biographer, says that he was "at ten years of age an artist, at twelve a poet." He had certainly, between his tenth and twelfth years, very decidedly shown the aptitudes which were to characterise him through life. The *Poetical Sketches*, Blake's first printed volume, are said to have been begun in his "twelfth year," and they are hardly likely to have been the first fruits of his genius.

At ten he had manifested so much of the artistic gift—drawing "designs on the backs of all the shop bills," and making "sketches on the counter," says Cunningham—as to induce his parents to send him to Parr's drawing school. This was in the Strand, and was the chief school then extant for budding artists. Here Blake drew from the antique—that is, from plaster casts after the antique. The instruction he received thus was eked out by home work. His father bought him casts to copy, and gave him occasional money with which to buy prints for furtherance of study. Hence he was led to haunt sale-rooms and print-sellers' shops on the watch for bargains. He already showed a singular taste in his selection, the objects of his choice being the works of Michael Angelo, Raphael, Giulio Romano among the Italians, those of Albert Dürer and Martin Hemskirk among the Germans, whereas the popular taste inclined to the Guidos and Caraccis. Nor was he to be moved from his choice, though his companions laughed at his "mechanical taste."

We have this on the authority of Dr. Malkin, whose "Father's Memoirs of his Child"—a hapless prodigy of learning—illustrated by a frontispiece of Blake's design, contains also some interesting biographical details respecting the poet-artist, derived from his own lips. "Langford" (an auctioneer), he writes, called Blake "his little connoisseur, and often knocked down a cheap lot with friendly precipitation." Later in life, Blake himself wrote (in his MS. notes to Reynolds): "I am happy I cannot say that Raphael ever was, from my earliest childhood, hidden from me. I saw and I knew immediately the difference between Raphael and Rubens."

In every way his tastes and inclinations betokened a precocious mind. When other boys of his age would be out playing with their tops and marbles, he was busy with his pencil or his pen; or if the day invited to the open air, he was away into the nearest lying meadows. His favourite haunt was south of the Thames, where much that is now densely-crowded suburb was then rural village or open field. He loved especially to ramble through the lanes and bye-paths of Camberwell and Dulwich, and to drink in the sights and sounds of the bucolic year. Sometimes he even wandered as far as Croydon, and to delightful Walton-on-Thames.

These pleasant country roads and field-paths were a great attraction to him, and left a deep impress upon a mind sensitive to every natural object and influence. The northern suburbs, on the contrary, attracted him but little, and afterwards, as we know, he contracted a positive dislike for them.

It was on Peckham Rye, near to Dulwich Hill, that one of the most striking and momentous events of his boyhood occurred. Here, rambling along, as we may imagine, in the bright summer weather, he was suddenly startled by a vision of angels. There were so many of them apparently that their wings *bespangled every bough with stars*, as Gilchrist, his biographer, tells us.

Blake was then not more than ten years of age, if so much. On reaching home, he narrates his vision, and narrowly escapes a beating from his austere, truth-loving father. But the tenderer mother—possibly with personal experience of a similar, if less vivid, kind, certainly with clearer perception of the boy's nature—interposes and spares him. On another occasion he beholds angelic figures moving amongst the mowers. Once he astonishes his people by contrasting a dream-city whose houses were of gold, its pavements of silver, and its gates ornamented with precious stones, with the splendours of some foreign place. Out of nothing nothing comes; and clearly these visions did not arise without cause and origin. Is it possible that the mother, of whom we know so little, could have taken the child to hear the enraptured talk of some follower of Swedenborg on the New Jerusalem? We know that as early as 1743, Swedenborg was first introduced to an intercourse with the spiritual world in London, and that after that time he resided much in England, and wrote upon and taught his doctrines, winning many as believers and disciples,

James Blake's means were not such as to enable him to equip his talented son for the career of a painter, which would appear to have been the proper one for him, or to give him such an education as would have fitted him for the profession of letters. One cannot pretend to think that it was best so, holding that to a really great mind all aids are helpful; though it does sometimes happen that scholastic training dries up all originality, and converts the bounding mill-race into a tame and almost characterless rill.

In lieu of anything better, young Blake was bound apprentice to an engraver. This took place in the year 1771, when the lad was fourteen years of age. His master was James Basire (of Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields), a man of sterling qualities and of good repute in his calling, who held the position of engraver to the Royal Society and to the Society of Antiquaries. There had been an attempt to apprentice the lad to an engraver who stood higher in his profession than Basire. This was William W. Ryland, engraver to the king; but the negotiations fell through, and it is recorded by Gilchrist that, as father and son were leaving the engraver's place of business, the boy expressed his gratification thereat. "Father," he said, "I do not like the man's face; *it looks as if he will live to be hanged.*" A strange saying for a lad of fourteen; nevertheless, twelve years later, Ryland did actually die of the hangman's rope for a forgery committed on the East India Company.

The boy Blake found in Basire a kind and conscientious master, and a craftsman who grounded him

thoroughly in his art, although the art as practised by him was of a hard, dry, and formal character, well suited, perhaps, to the monumental work of the Society of Antiquaries, though at that time beginning to be superseded in public esteem by the lighter touch and more graceful lines of men like Woollett, Strange, and Bartolozzi. This proved unfortunate for Blake, as it placed him at a disadvantage when he came later to have dealings with booksellers and publishers.

Blake, being a studious and painstaking youth, got on well with his employer, and soon learned under his guidance to draw carefully and to make faithful copies of whatever was placed before him. He learned also to use the graver deftly, and we may conclude that he did his share of work on the engravings produced by Basire at this time, the most notable of which were "Lady Stanhope as the Fair Penitent" (after B. Wilson), in 1772, and "The Field of the Cloth of Gold and Interview of the Two Kings" (after Edwards), in 1774. The latter print was then notable as the largest that had up to that time been engraved on one plate, its size being 47 by 27 inches.

In the third year of Blake's apprenticeship, Basire took two other apprentices, and thence arose causes of disharmony. The new apprentices proved less tractable than Blake, as well as more cunning. They appear to have played upon his simple, honest nature, and so induced him to take sides with them against their master. But out of this apparent evil, as Blake

himself would have called it, good came. Basire, in order to keep his gentler-natured apprentice from the corrupting influence of the others, sent him to make drawings of the monuments and other objects of interest in Westminster Abbey and various old churches in and near London, of which Gough the antiquary wanted engravings. Blake was always very grateful to Basire for this employment; and we can well imagine that the youth who, even in boyhood, used to take long solitary walks in the country, would find pleasure in the opportunity for quiet study and meditation which was afforded him by the days thus spent in the sacred edifices. We know that his art was greatly influenced by his present studies: may it not be that his whole subsequent career acquired a tinge and bias, and his character also, from the same cause?

These labours continued during the summer months for several years; in the winter he helped to engrave the plates derived from his studies, and in some cases, we are told, executed the engravings single-handed. Of evenings, and in other hours of leisure, he amused himself, and at the same time laid the foundation of his future style, by exercising himself in drawing, deriving his subjects sometimes from English history, sometimes from his "teeming fancy." Among these Gilchrist mentions one as already characteristic of his later years. It is entitled, *Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion*, and is founded on a design by Michael Angelo.

During these same years of apprenticeship Blake

continued to write poetry, and it was his delight to adorn his mother's room with the drawings and verses thus made. What would not one now give to see the room thus decorated by the loving and inspired youth!

Two incidents connected with these Abbey days must be given, being as they are important as indicative of character. Gilchrist is the authority for one. Speaking of the influence of the "spirit of the past," he says: "Sometimes his dreaming eye saw more palpable shapes from the phantom past: once a vision of 'Christ and the Apostles,' as he used to tell; and I doubt not others." This as to the visionary faculty, which was still active.

The other incident is thus related in the recently published and highly interesting "William Blake," of Messrs. Ellis and Yeats. "For a long time," say the authors, "during his work in the Abbey, Blake was greatly annoyed by the Westminster students. Perched high upon a scaffolding, wholly absorbed in copying some high monument or soaring tracery, he seemed to them providentially appointed to be their victim. . . . Blake reached out from his scaffolding and flung a boy from a cornice, where he had climbed to tease him the better." This, too, is characteristic. Naturally of the gentlest and most inoffensive disposition, he could yet be easily provoked into violence and retaliation.

When out of his apprenticeship, which finished in 1778, Blake studied for some time in the Antique School of the Royal Academy. Mr. Moser was then

keeper, and Blake has left us an anecdote respecting a conflict of opinion on art that occurred between them, which is both amusing and instructive.

He was looking over some prints from Raphael and Michael Angelo in the library of the Royal Academy, when Moser came in and advised him not to study those old, dry, and hard, unfinished works of art, referring him instead to the works of Lebrun and Rubens. "These things that you call *finished*," replied Blake, "are not even begun; how then can they be finished?"

He drew much from the antique, and got on well with it; afterwards, also, he drew from the living model; but the latter practice he disliked. Nor can one wonder that he "conceived a distaste for the study as pursued in academies of art," and fancied the "life," as presented by a model, "artificially posed to enact an artificial part," "more like death" than life, and "smelling of mortality." This is a touch essentially Blake-like, and we can only honour him for the protest. The study of the nude, as practised to-day, is a blot on nineteenth-century art, and does, indeed, "smell of mortality."

Blake was now fairly launched on his career as an engraver and artist. He engraved, on his own account, for the booksellers, while the time not so occupied he devoted to water-colour painting. Among other commissions of this time were engravings for the *Novelists'* and *Ladies' Magazines*. Among those for the latter were some prints after Thomas Stothard, to whom he had been introduced by a brother-engraver

named Trotter. About the same time he became known to Flaxman, the sculptor, through the introduction of Stothard. Both these gentlemen professed to be his good friends and sincere admirers; but there is reason to believe that both profited alike from his genius and his good-nature.

Another man whose friendship was formed about this period, namely, Fuseli, affirmed that Blake was "damned good to steal from"; but though he made this confession, it does not appear that he practised any such "conveyance." It may be that the saying was satirical, and was prompted by the knowledge of the extent to which his friend's kindness and simplicity were imposed upon by those who, with infinitely less genius, had the gift to know what was good, and to profit by his suggestions. According to Blake, both Stothard and Flaxman "stole" from him in this way. That Stothard laid himself open to the charge, and in a way that it is difficult wholly to clear him from, we shall presently see. But notwithstanding his simplicity and unworldliness of character—perhaps because of them—there was in Blake an impulsiveness, and even a vehemence of feeling, that often led him to impute wrong-doing on the slenderest foundations, and to make the most damaging charges without the least proof. When he found out his error he was ever ready to withdraw his charges; but then, on the slightest provocation, he would repeat the offence. In short, he was pre-eminently one of the genus irritabile, very largely without tact, and utterly without worldly wisdom, so that the story of his life is very much a

story of his quarrels with friends, and of accusations against them.

To these days of early effort belong two works of which we have some account by Gilchrist. One is an engraving—published many years later—entitled “King Edward and Queen Eleanor;” the other a drawing, “The Romance of Jane Shore.” In 1750 Blake exhibited for the first time in the Royal Academy, the picture being “The Death of Earl Goodwin”—probably a drawing in water-colours—of which nothing is now known. He had pictures in the Academy five times in all, his last exhibits being “Christ in the Sepulchre guarded by Angels,” and “Jacob’s Dream,” in 1808.

Two years later (1782) the poet-artist was married to Catherine Boucher, a woman four years his junior, and so illiterate as to be unable to write her name. Blake had had a previous love experience, which caused him some pain. Of this he was making complaint one evening in a friend’s house, when Catherine, who “heard his moan,” said she “pitied him from her heart.” “Do you pity me?” he asked. “Yes, I do, most sincerely,” was the girl’s reply. “Then I love you for that!” exclaimed Blake. From this promising beginning sprang a courtship that ended in one of the truest marriages of which history contains any record.

By way of compensation for her lack of education, she appears to have been exceptionally gifted in all the qualities that tended to fit her for companionship with a man who was not only extremely unworldly, but self-willed and even dogmatic to the last degree. Yet

through all their years of wedded life she never failed to be in full sympathy with his aims and work ; indeed, she appears to have fallen in with his habits of life and his thoughts so completely as to become truly a second self to him, even to the extent of sharing what people have been too ready to set down as madness, if we may credit the story of his most generous patron, Mr. Thomas Butts, who records having once found Blake and his wife quietly seated in a little summer-house in a state of nature : "Come in," cried Blake ; "it's only Adam and Eve, ycu know." They had, says Gilchrist, been reciting passages from *Paradise Lost*, in character.

John Linnell, who knew Blake as well as any man, albeit not at this particular time, doubted the story, and said it was a most unlikely thing for him to do. He said also, that he never perceived any sign of insanity in his friend. But then, insanity so called is a very illusive quality, present to-day, gone to-morrow, according as it attacks the whole, or only a part of the brain or mind.

No man probably ever found a better or truer helpmate than Blake did in his wife. She toiled and drudged for him ; was a careful housewife, making his generally scanty means go as far as possible ; helped him in his art, and even developed some skill in designing. What was more than all this, she believed in him, gave implicit credit to his visions, and to some extent acquired the faculty of seeing them herself. She was ever patient and uncomplaining, and begrudged no service that she seemed to be called upon to perform. No "servant of the Lord"

was ever waited upon with more care and devotion than this prophet by his wife. "She would get up in the night," says one witness,¹ "when he was under his very fierce inspirations, which were as if they would tear him asunder, while he was yielding himself to the Muse, or whatever else it could be called, sketching and writing. And so terrible a task did this seem to be, that she had to sit motionless and silent, only to stay him mentally, without moving hand or foot : this for hours, and night after night."

In the earlier days of their marriage, there appears to have been some sort of trouble, arising out of jealousy or uneasiness on the wife's part, occasioned in all probability by her husband's expressed opinions on the relations of the sexes, which were of a very broad character, amounting, in fact, to a belief in free love. Once, indeed, it is said that he proposed to add a second wife to his establishment, in imitation of the patriarchs. But whether this be so or not, it is certain that as Mrs. Blake came to know her husband better, all cause of suspicion, irritation or doubt subsided, and they lived together to the end of their days as it is the fortunate lot of but few married people to do.

When first married, Blake and his wife went to live in lodgings at No. 23, Green Street, Leicester Fields, (now Leicester Square). It is said that the marriage did not please the respectable hosier his father, who

¹ Mr John Thomas Smith, author of "The Life of Nollekens," in his *A Book for a Rainy Day*.

had no doubt looked to his clever son to make a better "match."

About this time, Blake was introduced by Flaxman to a lady of some note in her day. This was Mrs. Mathew, the wife of the Rev. Henry Mathew, a woman apparently of some learning and literary gift, whose house in Rathbone Place (No. 27), Oxford Street, was the resort of not a little of the talent and genius of the day. Flaxman had been a *protégé* of hers from his youth, and had received much help and encouragement at her hands; later, he had been introduced by her to wealthy patrons. To Blake also, she and her husband extended their patronage; and no doubt the introduction to polite society, and to some of the notable people of the day, which he thus gained, had its benefits. Here Blake sometimes read his poems—sang them too, it is said. This we have on the authority of Mr. "Nollekens" Smith as he was called, then a young man of eighteen years of age, who met Blake for the first time in the Mathews' drawing-room, and who heard him "read and sing several of his poems." Blake knew nothing of musical science, but like most poets, must have had a good ear for music. But he seems also to have possessed a gift for original composition, as Smith tells us that the airs to which he sang his verses were "most singularly beautiful," and "were noted down by musical professors."

These performances were a source of much delight at Mrs. Mathew's gatherings. The poet "was listened to by the company," says Smith, "with profound

silence," while his compositions were "allowed by most of the visitors to possess original and extraordinary merit." Hence this quaint "maker" was ever a welcome guest in the little circle of Rathbone Place. His enjoyment of these gatherings, however, was not destined to last very long. There was too much transparent sincerity and independence of mind about him to suit a dilettante society like that of the Mathews. "It happened, unfortunately," writes Smith, "that soon after this period (1784), in consequence of his unbending deportment, or what his adherents are pleased to call his manly firmness of opinion, which certainly was not at all times considered pleasing by everyone, his visits were not so frequent." One suspects, from the evident feeling imported into the penultimate and ante-penultimate clauses of this statement, that Mr. Smith himself had had some passage of arms with the poet, and had come off perhaps but second best. Possibly he had tried to "put him down," or correct some of his "erroneous" opinions, with the effect of calling forth fulminations of wrath which we can well imagine.

The result was that Blake's intimacy with the Mathews came to an end—his visits, doubtless, becoming gradually less and less frequent, and finally ceasing altogether. But one circumstance of importance arose out of this friendship with Mrs. Mathew and her husband. That was the publication of the *Poetical Sketches*, Blake's first volume of verse, which appeared in 1783, and was printed chiefly at the expense of Mr. Mathew and Flaxman. The latter had so great

an admiration for Blake's poems that he at first offered to be at the charge of printing them himself, and now paid a moiety of the cost.

The volume is in octavo, and runs to 74 pages only ; but it would be hard to find in the whole range of English literature a "first-fruits" of such strange promise. It contains a brief preface by Mr. Mathew, who, while apologising for "irregularities and defects" in the poems, hopes that their "poetic originality merits some respite from oblivion." Little did he think to what extent this faint hope would be justified by the result.

The edition was presented to Blake to dispose of amongst his friends and admirers ; but it is very doubtful whether any large number was sold.

It is much to be regretted that his friends, so willing to do him a kindness, did not take the trouble to make it a little more effective. The printing was done in a way that would be a disgrace to any craftsman ; the proof-reading—if the book got any—must have been done in the most ignorant and perfunctory manner ; and, lastly, it was never, in the proper sense of the term, published at all. If the *Poetical Sketches* had been brought forth with a little more wisdom, and under somewhat happier auspices, it could hardly have helped achieving something better than the fate of falling still-born from the press, as it did. Howbeit, even the gross stupidity of its bringing forth was not sufficient to condemn it to that "oblivion" from which Mr. Mathew so mildly desiderated "some respite."

In the summer of 1784, Blake's father died, and the hosiery business was carried on by his eldest son James, who seems to have taken much after his father, and to have been a shrewd and careful business man. But he, too, appears to have had his visionary side, as well as William, and to have been a convinced Swedenborgian. Notwithstanding this fact, however, there was but little sympathy between the brothers, and they henceforth got on but ill together.

Soon after the death of his father, Blake determined to try his hand at business, and in partnership with a former fellow-apprentice named Parker, took the shop (No. 27) next door to his brother's in Broad Street.

The Mathews, according to Smith, to whom we owe much of our knowledge of Blake in these early days, enabled Blake to make this venture. The help was undoubtedly kindly meant; but it can hardly be said to have been wisely bestowed. A more unlikely man for business than Blake the dreamer could scarcely be imagined. However, the partnership subsisted from 1794 until 1797, two years and a half in all, and then the legend, "Parker and Blake, engravers and printsellers," was obliterated from over the little window for ever.

Nevertheless, the episode was a memorable one in the poet-artist's career. His younger brother, Robert, formed part of the household, Blake having taken him as a pupil in engraving, instructing him at the same time in the use of the pencil and brush, as an exponent of his own imaginative conceptions. He proved to be not only an apt scholar, but to be pos-

sessed of considerable gift in design. But his career was destined to be one of promise only. Early in 1797 he died, and was buried in Bunhill Fields on February 11th. Blake tended him in his last illness day and night, and when the supreme moment of transition occurred, he had one of those strange experiences so characteristic of his genius, and so bewildering to the merely normal man : beholding " the released spirit of his brother ascend heavenwards through the matter-of-fact ceiling, ' clapping its hands for joy.' " ¹

A striking incident, illustrative of the life of the little household, and of the personages comprising it, is related by Gilchrist. A dispute having arisen between Robert and Mrs. Blake, she was led to use words to him which her husband thought unwarrantable. " Kneel down and beg Robert's pardon directly," he cried, in one of his moods of impetuous indignation, " or you never see my face again ! " The dutiful wife, though she felt that she was not in the wrong, nevertheless went down on her knees, and said, " Robert, I beg your pardon ; I am in the wrong." " Young woman, you lie ! " was the brusque retort ; " I am in the wrong ! " There was evidently an odd, impulsive, and at the same time generous, strain in this family of Blakes.

When, in consequence of disputes with Parker, the ill-advised business enterprise came to an end, Blake removed into near-lying Poland Street, where (at No. 28, not many doors from Oxford Street) he remained

¹ Gilchrist.

for five years. Here it was that he conceived one of the happiest and most characteristic of his inventions. Ever striving to make himself and his message known to the world, and unable now, as formerly, to command printer or publisher, he hit upon a most original plan for multiplying copies of his *Songs of Innocence*. He attributed the idea to the spirit of his dead brother Robert, who, appearing to him in a dream, told him how to go to work to produce *fac-similes* of his poems, and the illustrative designs in colour with which he had twined them, as it were, in a garland of triple loveliness.

The method, according to Gilchrist, consisted of a species of engraving in relief both words and design. The verse was written and the designs outlined on the copper by means of stopping-out varnish. Then the "lights" were eaten away by means of a mordant, aquafortis in all probability, the result being a plate with raised letters and design, as in stereotype. From these plates he produced the ground tints of his designs and the letterpress of the poems, the latter generally in red, the former variously in yellow, brown, or blue, as the drawing required. The page was then finished, in imitation of the original drawing, by hand.

The artist was assisted in the work of printing and colouring by Mrs. Blake, who became quite an adept at the work; but otherwise everything was done by himself, even to the grinding of his colours; the method of doing which was communicated, according to the artist, by St. Joseph. Never before, or since,

perhaps, was a book produced so completely by one hand.

The "*Songs of Innocence*, the author and printer, W. Blake, 1789" (as the title runs), form a small octavo volume of twenty-seven pages, bound together in boards, the last being the work of Mrs. Blake.

Five years after the *Songs of Innocence*, namely, in 1794, appeared the complementary volume, the *Songs of Experience*, which were produced in the same manner as the former volume. After this the two collections were usually bound together in the same cover, and named *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. The price the poet obtained for the united volume ranged from £1 10s. to £2 2s., but in later years he frequently received as much as £5 5s., and even more.

In the same year as the *Songs of Innocence* appeared the first of the so-called "Prophetic Books," namely, *The Book of Thel*. The method of production in this, as in all Blake's subsequent publications, except one—presently to be noted—was the same as in the case of the two just referred to. *Thel*, although the simplest and most comprehensible of the "Prophetic Books," is not a poem for all. It is a piece of pure allegory, very beautiful, but highly mystical. The illustration, or, as we might perhaps more fittingly say, the illumination of these books, is strikingly in keeping with the poems themselves. Each page is surrounded with a garland of most beautiful forms set in the richest colouring. The figures, whether of human beings or of animals, are all suggestive of innocence and purity, and seem in the words of one of the earliest notices of

Blake's work, to "give us glimpses of all that is noblest in the childhood of the world and the individual." Both the figures and the verse are tinted with a variety of colours, lending to the whole a rich and lustrous beauty. In regard to colour, however, copies vary greatly, some being exceedingly rich, while others are rather tame in comparison. This is especially true of the *Songs of Innocence*, which appears to have had the largest sale. To about this date belongs also a poem which was published for the first time in the Aldine edition of the poet's works, namely, *Tiriel*. Mr. Swinburne refers it to a date earlier even than the earliest of the "Prophetic Books," and, judged by its style of thought and execution, it strikes one as being cruder than *Thel*, and therefore prior in point of time to that composition. But it may be that this fancied crudity arises from the circumstance that in it Blake seems to be taking his first steps in the style that was to characterise most of his later, more visionary and mystical works, and that it was in reality a subsequent production to *Thel*.

The Book of Thel was followed in 1790 by *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, a work of a character altogether different from the former. It seems to have been suggested by Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*, and appears to mark his mental revolt from that seer, to whose teachings he undoubtedly owed much of his spiritual development. After the opening argument, he has the following:—

"As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-

three years since its advent : the Eternal Hell revives, and lo ! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb : his writings are the linen clothes folded up. Now is the dominion of Edom, and the return of Adam into Paradise."

Further on he writes :—

"Swedenborg boasts that what he writes is new ; tho' it is only the Contents or Index of already published books.

"A man carried a monkey about for a show, and because he was a little wiser than the monkey, grew vain, and conceiv'd himself as much wiser than seven men. It is so with Swedenborg ; he shows the folly of churches and exposes hypocrites, till he imagines that all are religious, and himself the single one on earth that ever broke a net.

"Now hear a plain fact : Swedenborg has not written one new truth. And now hear another : he has written all the old falsehoods.

"And now hear the reason : He conversed with Angels who are all religious, and conversed not with Devils who all hate religion, for he was incapable through his conceited notions.

"Thus Swedenborg's writings are a recapitulation of all superficial opinions, and an analysis of the more sublime, but no further.

„ Have now another plain fact : Any man of mechanical talents may from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behmen, produce ten thousand

volumes of equal value with Swedenborg's, and from those of Dante or Shakespeare an infinite number.

"But when he has done this, let him not say that he knows better than his master, for he only holds a candle in sunshine."

This is a good specimen of Blake's prose style ; it at the same time exemplifies his method of dealing with an opponent, or one with whom he has lost all sympathy.

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell is not, properly speaking, a poem, being in prose, with the exception of the "Argument," which is in unrhymed verse. The daring utterances of the text are fittingly matched by the magnificence of design and colour in which they are set. It would be hard to say in which the imagination is most supreme.

In 1791, Blake found in Johnson, of St. Paul's Churchyard, a publisher for a thin unillustrated quarto entitled, *The French Revolution*. It was announced to appear in seven books at a shilling apiece ; but the first book failed to sell, and it was never followed by a second. Like the privately-printed *Poetical Sketches*, it may be said to have been still-born, probably not so many copies selling as the author sold of his engraved works to and through friends. Gilchrist speaks as though he had not seen a copy of the work, and it is doubtful if one exists.

In the same year Blake designed and engraved six plates for a volume of *Tales for Children*, by Mary Wollstonecraft ; but they are hard and formal, and

little calculated to recommend the artist for further commissions of the kind. This and another work which he likewise illustrated, the *Elements of Morality*, translated from the German by the same lady, were both issued by the publisher of *The French Revolution*.

Johnson was a notable man in his way, and was for many years on friendly terms with Blake, who attended his weekly dinners, and met in his house many of the more advanced spirits of his time, chief amongst whom were Priestley, Godwin, Holcroft, Thomas Paine, Fuseli, the artist, and Mary Wollstonecraft. Although differing from all these in respect to theological opinions, Blake was almost as much an extremist in respect to political, and certainly as much so in respect to social, matters as any of them. Like many other idealists of the time, he looked upon the French Revolution as a sort of first step towards the millennium, and, as has often been told, he donned the *bonnet rouge* in sign of his sympathy, and wore it openly in the streets, being the only one of the republican brotherhood who dared venture so far. But on the outbreak of the Red Terror in the latter days of 1792, all his enthusiasm for the cause suddenly died, and he put on the red cap no more.

It was about this time that Blake, either through his visionary faculty, or by means of his keener intellectual perception, was enabled to do Paine the serviceable turn of which the story has so often been told. They had met at Johnson's, and Paine had been telling them about a meeting at which he was present the previous evening, when, on his rising to leave,

Blake advised him not to go home, or he would be a dead man. He accordingly started at once for France, where he had been elected a member of the National Convention, and had barely set sail from Dover ere an order was received from the Home Office to detain him. The publication of the *Rights of Man* was the occasion of this mandate.

Two years after *The French Revolution* came *The Gates of Paradise*, a little book more notable for its designs than for the text accompanying them, although that is remarkable enough. According to the title, it was intended "for children," or "for the sexes," as some copies have it. A more original book was surely never conceived "for children." It consists of seventeen emblematic plates, each one fitted with a suitable or explanatory verse. These are called *The Keys of the Gates*. The first or introductory emblem represents an infant on a leaf in the form of a chrysalis; above it in another leaf is a caterpillar. The accompanying verse is:—

"The caterpillar on the leaf
Reminds thee of thy Mother's Grief."

Another design pictures several men with a ladder raised against the moon, and one of them beginning to ascend. Beneath it is a motto, "I want! I want!" A third represents a female figure seated in her shroud beneath the roots of a tree with a worm coiled about her feet. The motto to this emblem is, "I have said to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister!" The accompanying rhymes are often of the most obscure,

not to say cryptic description. Such are the "explanatory" lines to this emblem of the worm:—

“Thou’rt my Mother, from the Womb,
Wife, Sister, Daughter, to the Tomb:
Weaving to Dreams the Sexual Strife,
And weeping over the Web of Life.”

The above will give some, albeit a very faint, idea of the nature of *The Gates of Paradise*, which Allan Cunningham well described as “a sort of devout dream, equally wild and lovely.” A dream it most surely is, but the dream of one who dreams waking—of one who has seen deep into the heart of things, has questioned its mystery and its cruelty, and has found for himself the shadow of an answer. Both illustrations and text remind one forcibly of Quarles, his *Emblems*; howbeit there is a depth and weirdness of imaginative insight in Blake’s designs and the accompanying verse that leaves Quarles and all other writers of emblems and allegories hopelessly behind. The interest of the *Gates* is in the main artistic, and for that reason I refer to them thus fully here; but the verse, too, has its importance, since in it are embodied those leading articles of faith and doctrine which Blake conceived it to be his duty to deliver as a message to mankind. The opening verses set forth, with the daring by which his thought is ever characterised, one of those central theological canons of his system that he is never tired of enforcing.

“ Mutual forgiveness of each vice,
Such are the Gates of Paradise,
Against the Accuser's chief desire,
Who walked among the stones of fire.
Jehovah's fingers wrote The Law :
He wept ! then rose in zeal and awe,
And in the midst of Sinai's heat,
Hid it beneath His Mercy Seat.
O Christians ! Christians ! tell us why
You rear it on your altars high ? ”

This, and nearly all else that is written in the *Gates*, is perfectly clear and lucid in comparison with much that Blake subsequently wrote. The message is the same. Here it is set down in simple words and enforced by highly original and impressive designs for children ; but afterwards, when the deliverance is to men, the fiery energy of his thought kindles his words into flame, and the smoke and fumes and vapour of his wrath hide and obscure, not the evangel, but the fiery prophet, so that he seems but a wild, storm-blown untameable voice, vexed and half-inarticulate, yet a prophet still.

II.

IN the early part of 1793, Blake removed from Poland Street to No. 13 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth, and thence was issued the same year *The Vision of the Daughters of Albion* and *America: a Prophecy*. The first is a folio volume of unrhymed verse, like that of *Thel*, and with much of the delicate, mystical beauty of that poem; it does not, however, preserve the same quality throughout, but is marred by passages of the wildest bathos and incoherence. The *America*, too, is a folio of twenty pages of the most gnomic and incomprehensible verse, Ossian-like in its grim, shadowy forms and mist-like abstractions. In the following year (1794) appeared a sequel to the last-named book, entitled, *Europe: a Prophecy*. It is chiefly interesting as having for frontispiece the wonderful design of the "Ancient of Days," as shadowed forth in Proverbs viii. 27: "When he set a compass upon the face of the depth;" and again as described in *Paradise Lost* :—

"Then stay'd the fervid wheels, and in his hand
He took the golden compasses, prepared
In God's eternal store, to circumscribe
This universe, and all created things.
One foot he centred, and the other turn'd
Round through the vast rotundity obscure,
And said, Thus far extend, thus far thy bounds,
This be thy just circumference, O world!"

To the same year (1794) belongs Part I. of *The Book of Urizen*. This year Blake again received commissions from his old friend Flaxman, who had now returned from his seven years' sojourn in Italy, and was preparing to issue his designs for Homer, Hesiod, Æschylus, and Dante.

It was about the time of his going to live in Hercules Buildings that Blake made the acquaintance of Mr. Thomas Butts, a gentleman residing in Fitzroy Square, whose name has already been mentioned, who became, and remained for nearly thirty years, a steady and generous patron. He was, says Gilchrist, the largest buyer the artist ever had, at times taking a drawing a week. Some years later—namely in 1805—he appointed him drawing-master to his son at a yearly stipend of twenty-six pounds. The friendship between the two continued until about 1822, when Mr. Butts appears to have ceased his patronage, partly, it has been surmised, because his walls had become crowded with the artist's tempera-pictures and frescoes, as he styled them, and other works, and partly because of the increasing difficulty he found in avoiding giving offence to the old man, who, as infirmities were added to years, became less and less tolerant of advice and interference, and was apt at times to blurt out his opinions in no measured terms. Nor can it be wondered at when one considers the coldness and indifference with which he had been treated by the world. It should be said, however, that it had never been Mr. Butts' habit to bother the artist with his advice and suggestions, but, as Blake afterwards confessed,

he "always left him altogether to his own judgment."

It is to Mr. Butts that we owe the story which is most relied upon by Blake's detractors as pointing indubitably to his madness. I refer, of course, to the Adam and Eve incident. The story has often been pooh-poohed as a mistake or an invention of Mr. Butts; but it is impossible to get rid of it in that way without setting the narrator down as the fabricator of a malicious falsehood concerning one whom he admired and esteemed. There is nothing in the character of the man to warrant such an assumption; nor is the incident wholly improbable as the act of a person of Blake's known views and temperament.

In 1796-97 Blake made and engraved a series of designs for a new edition of Young's *Night Thoughts*. Edwards of Bond Street was the publisher, and he seems to have paid the artist at the miserable rate of a guinea a plate; yet some of his critics find fault with the work because it does not appear to have been inspired by the highest order of genius. Can one wonder? It was wretched task work, and for once Blake was not able to put his whole soul into it. Nor did it meet the public taste; and so, though the edition was to have been issued in parts, it did not get beyond the first. This extends to the end of "Night the Fourth," and includes forty-three designs. The plates of these occupied Blake a year, the part containing them appearing in 1797. According to an advertisement in the *Athenæum* in 1874 (referred to by Mr. W. M. Rossetti), the *Night Thoughts* series appears to have

consisted in all of 537 coloured drawings. These are said to have been sold by Edwards for twenty guineas.

In looking over these illustrations, one is struck by their poverty, their monotony, and as a whole, their lack of interest. It cannot be denied that they have something of the Blakeian touch, the Blakeian idiosyncrasy ; but there is nothing of that wild grandeur, and little of that passionate symbolism which lifts many of the designs for his own scriptures into the clear empyrean of art, where their otherwise too manifest blemishes are forgotten, or become potential beauties. The fact is, Blake's art was more or less an adjunct of, and subservient to, his poetry. It was literary rather than pictorial in the commonly accepted sense, having grown and developed under his hand as an additional means of giving expression to the burning thoughts that were in him. As such it must be judged, rather than as art pure and simple. If judged from the imitative standpoint, nothing could well, at times, be weaker ; but if regarded from the higher ground of imaginative conception and realisation, there is very little in English art that will bear comparison with it. On that side it places him on the same plane as Shakespeare, Hogarth, Turner, and others of that small but godlike company.

Two other events of some importance in the career of a man like Blake occurred during the Lambeth period, and should not be passed over unrecorded. One was the vision of "The Ancient of Days" before referred to, which he saw hovering above his head at the top of the staircase. Smith tells us that he was

"inspired with the splendid grandeur of this figure," and that he had been "frequently heard to say that it made a more powerful impression upon his mind than all he had ever been visited by."

On the same staircase (Gilchrist records) Blake, for the first and only time in his life, had sight of a ghost. The distinction he made between a ghost and a visionary being, such as he often saw, is interesting. "When talking on the subject of ghosts," says the just-named biographer, "he was wont to say they did not appear much to imaginative men, but only to common minds, who did not see the finer spirits. A ghost was a thing seen by the gross bodily eye; a vision, by the mental. 'Did you ever see a ghost?' asked a friend. 'Never but once,' was the reply. And it befel thus: standing one evening at his garden door in Lambeth, and chancing to look up, he saw a horrible grim figure, 'scaly, speckled, very awful,' stalking downstairs towards him. More frightened than ever before or after, he took to his heels, and ran out of the house."

Mrs. Blake told Frederick Tatham, after her husband's death, that they were never so well off as during the time they lived in Lambeth. He appears to have had plenty of engraving work to do. He had a number of pupils, to whom he taught drawing, and he was even offered—so it is said—the position of drawing-master to the King's children. We know that he was at the time selling drawings to Mr. Butts, if not to others, and that he occasionally sold copies of his poetical works.

We also learn that Blake was so rich at this period that he could afford to assist a man who was in difficulties with a loan of forty pounds. His kindliness of heart was shown also by giving instruction to a poor youth who, though stricken with mortal disease, was striving to become an artist.

But, notwithstanding these recollections of prosperity by Mrs. Blake, it is hard to believe that Blake was really doing so very well, when we find him, in the year 1800, accepting an invitation from the poet Hayley to go and live at Felpham, Sussex, in order to help him with a *Life of Cowper* upon which he was engaged, by engraving the illustrations for it; and when he gives as his reason for so doing that Fuseli, the bookseller Johnson, and others, made "great objections to my doing anything but the mere drudgery of business, and intimations that, if I do not confine myself to this, I shall not live."

William Hayley was a country gentleman of some means and mediocre talent, who enjoyed considerable repute in his day as the author of the *Triumphs of Temper*, and other works, now never read, and, indeed, hardly remembered, but, as is usually the case with the minors in verse and prose, greatly admired by his contemporaries. He had an estate at Eartham, near Bognor, whence he liked to be styled "The Hermit of Eartham;" but during Blake's sojourn at Felpham, a near-lying seaside village, he resided in a marine villa which he had built for himself in the same village.

Here Blake rented a small cottage at £20 a year,

and in it managed to exist for three years and a half; his only sister forming a part of the household. At first the poet and artist was delighted with the change from murky London to the freshness and serenity of his new country home; and in a letter written to Flaxman, in September (1800), he becomes almost dithyrambic in his praises of rural and sea-washed Felpham. On this, as well as other grounds, it is worth quoting:—

“DEAR SCULPTOR OF ETERNITY,

“We are safe arrived at our cottage, which is more beautiful than I thought it, and more convenient. It is a perfect model for cottages, and I think for palaces of magnificence—only enlarging, not altering, its proportions, and adding ornaments and not principles. Nothing can be more grand than its simplicity and usefulness. Simple without intricacy, it seems to be the spontaneous expression of humanity, congenial to the wants of man. No other formed house can ever please me so well; nor shall I ever be persuaded, I believe, that it can be improved either in beauty or use.

“Mr. Hayley received us with his usual brotherly affection. I have begun to work. Felpham is a sweet place for study, because it is more spiritual than London. Heaven opens here on all sides her golden gates; her windows are not obstructed by vapours; voices of celestial inhabitants are more distinctly heard, and their forms more distinctly seen; and my cottage is also a shadow of their houses. My wife and sister are both well, courting Neptune for an embrace.

“Our journey was very pleasant, and, though we had a great deal of luggage, no grumbling. All was cheerfulness and good-humour on the road; and yet we could not arrive at our cottage before half-past eleven at night, owing to the

necessary shifting of our luggage from one chaise to another—for we had seven different chaises, and as many different drivers. We set out between six and seven in the morning of Thursday, with sixteen heavy boxes and portfolios full of prints.

“And now begins a new life, because another covering of earth is shaken off. I am more famed in heaven for my works than I could well conceive. In my brain are studies and chambers filled with books and pictures of old, which I wrote and printed in ages of eternity before my mortal life; and these works are the delight and study of archangels. Why then should I be anxious about the riches or fame of mortality? The Lord our Father will do for us and with us according to His divine will, for our good.

“You, O dear Flaxman, are a sublime archangel—my friend and companion from eternity. In the divine bosom is our dwelling-place. I look back into the regions of reminiscence and behold our ancient days before this earth appeared in its vegetated mortality to my mortal vegetated eyes. I see our houses of eternity, which can never be separated, though our mortal vehicles should stand at the remotest corners of heaven from each other.

“Farewell, my best friend. Remember me and my wife in love and friendship to our dear Mrs. Flaxman, whom we ardently desire to entertain beneath our thatched roof of rusted gold. And believe me for ever to remain your grateful and affectionate

“WILLIAM BLAKE.

“FELPHAM, September 21st, 1800,
“Sunday Morning.”

All this effusive affection and good feeling for Flaxman arose out of the fact that it was through his introduction that Blake came to know Hayley, and that he was at the time of writing perfectly charmed with the bright prospect before him, and the idyllic beauty

of his surroundings. Later, when he was not in such a happy mood, we shall find the "dear sculptor of eternity" descending from the blessed regions of the archangels to the nether abysses of devils.

But neither at Felpham, nor anywhere else, was Blake destined to find life an idyll; men of his temper and construction of mind never do. Though Hayley appears to have been a man of a genial and kindly nature, and not by any means of an ungenerous disposition, yet he was vain, and not a little puffed up by the applause with which the *Triumphs of Temper* and his other works had been received by the public. Hence, perhaps, it was natural that he should look down upon poor Blake, a man who had been recommended to him as a clever engraver, with some gifts as a painter, and leanings of a somewhat futile sort towards poetry. It seems almost impossible now that such could have been the attitude that Hayley assumed towards Blake; but there can be no doubt that the lesser man looked down upon the greater in some such manner as this, and, in short, patronised the poet and artist to an unconscionable degree. Blake was not the man to put up with this sort of treatment very long without an outburst, and outburst there presently was, resulting in a partial clearing of the air, and allowing matters to go on more smoothly for a time, but revealing the utterly antipathetic natures of the two men, and demonstrating the impossibility of there being any real unity of spirit between them. Nor can one deny—looking at the character of Blake as we know it, and as

shown in his letters during this period to Mr. Butts—that he was almost as much to blame as Hayley for the soreness and irritation which arose between them. Nay, it is a question, considering the duties laid upon the higher nature, whether Blake was not the greater sinner of the two. For not only assuredly was his the higher and more gifted nature, but he had, or believed he had, the whole spiritual world at his back to aid and direct him. “I am under the direction of messengers from heaven, daily and nightly,” he writes to Mr. Butts (Jan., 1802), and all through the Felpham days he claims to be saturated with spiritual vision. Yet he writes the most ill-natured things of Hayley to Mr. Butts, and is not ashamed to make disgraceful charges against him. These he handsomely withdraws later; but the fact remains that whenever anything happened to disturb him, he acted more like a child than a calm, reasoning man.

In every respect this Felpham period was a strange one, and gives us more insight into the poet's real character than anything else we know of him. As to the special business that took him thither, the illustrations for the *Life of Cowper*, these were completed in due course. In addition, Blake illustrated a book of *Ballads on Anecdotes relating to Animals*, by Hayley, the proceeds of the sale of which were to go to him; engraved (1803) some designs by Maria Flaxman, the sculptor's sister, to illustrate the *Triumphs of Temper*, and painted miniature portraits of some of the gentry of the neighbourhood, to whom

his patron introduced him ; amongst others being one of the Rev. John Johnson, Cowper's cousin.

It is said that he was also offered a commission to paint a set of hand-screens for a lady, but that, though he was generally ready to accept any work that came to his hand, he drew the line at hand-screens—why one can hardly understand. Whilst at Felpham, also, he decorated Hayley's library with eighteen heads of the poets, life size, amongst the number being Shakespeare, Homer, Sidney, Cowper, and Hayley himself.

For most men this would be a very good bill of labour for a little over three years ; but besides the above works, he had commissions for drawings for Mr. Butts, some of which he executed ; others, however, he seems to have neglected, and to have got into that gentleman's bad books for so doing. So, at least, we gather from his letters to Mr. Butts, in which we find such expressions as, "Such, my dear sir, is the truth of my state, and I tell it you in palliation of my seeming neglect of your most pleasant orders ;" and, "I thank you again and again for your generous forbearance." In a long epistle, written in November, 1802, he begins by saying, "My brother tells me that he fears you are offended with me. I fear so, too, because there appears some reason why you might be so." And in a sort of addendum to the same missive, he begs for "a letter of forgiveness if you were offended, and of accustomed friendship if you were not." The desired letter came in due season, and greatly pleased the recipient.

It is much to be regretted that we have not Mr.

Butts' own correspondence to Blake. It would have thrown much light upon Blake's condition of mind at this time. There undoubtedly appears to have been some irritation on Mr. Butts' part, whatever the cause may have been. Possibly it was simply because the drawings that were commissioned—and in part if not wholly paid for—were not forthcoming; but one cannot help suspecting another, if subsidiary, cause of annoyance in Blake's unorthodox views in regard to Christianity. It is evident from the works the artist executed for Mr. Butts at this time—amongst which were "A Holy Family in Egypt," "Jephthah Sacrificing his Daughter," "Ruth," "The Three Marys at the Sepulchre," "The Death of Joseph," "The Death of the Virgin Mary," and "St. Paul Preaching"—that he was a very religious man. And then we have such expressions as these:—"And now let me finish with assuring you that, though I have been very unhappy, I am now so no longer. I am again emerged into the light of day; I still, and shall to eternity, embrace Christianity, and adore Him who is the express image of God; but I have travelled through perils and darkness not unlike a champion. I have conquered, and shall go on conquering." Again, in a letter a few months later (April 25th, 1803), he writes:—"I take your advice. I see the face of my Heavenly Father: He lays His hand upon my head, and gives a blessing to all my work." These would appear to point to some religious exhortation on Mr. Butts' part, which was not unkindly received by his correspondent.

One reason of Blake's neglect of his picture commissions was probably the fury of the poetic afflatus under which he laboured at this time. Amongst other works then largely composed and designed were *Jerusalem*, *The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, and *Milton : a Poem in Two Books*, although neither of them was published until his return to London. As reference will have to be made later to these works, it will suffice here to say that in his preface to the *Jerusalem*, he speaks of that work as having been "dictated" to him, and in his letters to Mr. Butts he uses the same expression in regard to its origin. "I have," he says, "written this poem—the *Jerusalem*—from immediate dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without premeditation, and even against my will." In another place he says :—"I may praise it, since I dare not pretend to be other than the secretary ; the authors are in eternity."

Notwithstanding his delight at the change from London to Felpham, and the fact that the "voices of celestial inhabitants" were "more distinctly heard and their forms more distinctly seen there than in London," Blake appears very soon to have been disillusioned as to its supposed superiority over the metropolis. In a letter written in July, 1802, he says, "If I could have returned to London a month after my arrival here, I should have done so." He intimates that one reason of his dissatisfaction and unhappiness has been Hayley's lack of appreciation of his more spiritual work. "Mr. H," he says, "approves of my designs as little as he does of my poems,

and I have been forced to insist on his leaving me, in both, to my own self-will ; for I am determined to be no longer pestered with his genteel ignorance and polite disapprobation." He goes on to speak of his "patience and forbearance" in face of "injuries upon injuries," which he bore because commanded to do so by his "spiritual friends." And there is much more to the same effect ; showing that his pride had been wounded by Hayley's inability to appreciate his mystical and prophetic writings.

He indicates in a previous letter that his dissatisfaction with Felpham arose to some extent from the unhealthiness of the place. Both he and his wife had been made ill by it, but she in especial. "The ague and rheumatism," he writes, "have been almost her constant enemies, which she has combatted in vain almost ever since we have been here."

"The visions were angry with me at Felpham," he used to say in after years ; and despite the amount of work he got through, it would really seem as though they were when we consider the incident which may be said to have finally decided him to return to London. I refer to his trial for high treason, of which he may be allowed to give his own account.

"I am at present in a bustle," he writes to Mr. Butts, "to defend myself against a very unwarrantable warrant from a justice of peace at Chichester, which was taken out against me by a private in Captain Lethes' troop of 1st, or Royal Dragoons, for an assault and seditious words. The wretched man has terribly perjured himself, as has his comrade ; for,

as to sedition, not one word relating to the King or Government was spoken by either him or me. His enmity arises from my having turned him out of my garden, into which he was invited as an assistant by a gardener at work therein, without my knowledge that he was so invited. I desired him, as politely as possible, to go out of the garden ; he refused. I still persisted in desiring his departure. He then threatened to knock out my eyes, with many abominable imprecations, and with some contempt for my person ; it affronted my foolish pride. I therefore took him by the elbows, and pushed him forward till I had got him out. There I had intended to have left him ; but he, turning about, put himself into a posture of defiance, threatening and swearing at me. I, perhaps foolishly and perhaps not, stepped out of the gate, and, putting aside his blows, took him again by the elbows, and, keeping his back to me, pushed him forward down the road about fifty yards—he all the while endeavouring to turn round and strike me, and raging and cursing, which drew out several neighbours. At length, when I got him to where he was quartered, which was very quickly done, we were met at the gate by the master of the house—the Fox Inn—(who is the proprietor of my cottage) and his wife and daughter, and the man's comrade, and several other people. My landlord compelled the soldiers to go indoors, after many abusive threats against me and my wife from the two soldiers ; but not one word of threat on account of sedition was uttered at that time. This method of revenge was planned between them after they

had got together into the stable. This is the whole outline."

He goes on to state that his gardener, a next-door neighbour (a miller's wife), and the landlord, his wife and daughter were ready to give evidence to the effect that he spoke no seditious word. He then continues :

"I have been before a bench of justices at Chichester this morning ; but they, as the lawyer who wrote down the accusation told me in private, are compelled by the military to suffer a prosecution to be entered into, although they must know, and it is manifest, that the whole is a fabricated perjury. I have been forced to find bail. Mr. Hayley was kind enough to come forward, and Mr. Seagrave, printer at Chichester ; Mr. H. in £100, and Mr. S. in £50, and myself am bound in £100 for my appearance at the Quarter Sessions, which is after Michaelmas. So I shall have the satisfaction to see my friends in town before this contemptible business comes on. I say contemptible, for it must be manifest to everyone that the whole accusation is a wilful perjury. . . I have heard that my accuser is a disgraced sergeant ; his name is John Scholfield."

The trial took place at the Chichester Quarter Sessions on the 11th of January, 1804. Blake was charged with having "uttered seditious and treasonable expressions ; such as, Damn the King ; damn all his subjects ; damn his soldiers, they are all slaves ; when Bonaparte comes, it will be cut-throat for cut-throat, and the weakest must go to the wall ; I will help him," etc., etc. Although Hayley had met with an accident

while riding a few days before, he made a point of being present and giving evidence in Blake's defence. His neighbours also came forward and joined the "Hermit" in giving him a "character of habitual gentleness and peaceableness."

In short, after a patient hearing, it appears to have been so manifest that the charge was a trumped-up affair that an acquittal was the result. This "so gratified the auditory," says the newspaper report of the trial, "that the court was, in defiance of all decency, thrown into an uproar by their noisy exultations."

One is glad to hear of that "noisy exultation," although it was "in defiance of all decency." To us of to-day it is the brightest spot of light in the whole trial, showing how the common people, when they get a fair chance, inevitably recognise a true man.

Blake used to declare, says Gilchrist, that the Government, or some person of high position, knowing his republican tendencies, and that he had been of the Paine set, sent the soldier to entrap him. This sort of suspiciousness was one of the poet's weaknesses, and betrayed him at times into saying foolish things. The Government of the time was not by any means a pattern of the virtues; but it would be setting it down too low in the scale of moral and intellectual idiocy to believe it capable of so vicious and futile a plot as the one suggested.

This trial scene is the last one of any interest to us in what we may call the Felpham period. Blake calls the sojourn there a "three years' slumber," and so, by

implication, seems to regard his return to London in the light of an awakening, 'as in a sense it doubtless was. To anyone else the transition from the pretty sea-side village to South Molton Street, Oxford Street (No. 17—where he remained for nearly seventeen years), must have been a rude one; but to Blake, to whom the spiritual world was always open, it seems to have been a matter of indifference where his earthly tabernacle was pitched.

From the first floor of South Molton Street were issued the "Prophetic Books" to which his mind had given birth at Felpham, namely, the *Jerusalem* and the *Milton*, undoubtedly the greatest of his works, as the poet seems to have regarded them, and, as he says, "the grand reason for my being brought down here." In an address to the public prefacing the *Jerusalem*, Blake writes:—

"After three years' slumber on the banks of ocean, I again display my giant forms to the public; my former giants and fairies having received the highest reward. . . . I cannot doubt that this more consolidated and extended work will be as kindly received."

Both the *Jerusalem* and the *Milton* are in quarto form. The former numbers a hundred engraved pages, writing and design, while the latter runs to forty-five pages. Some copies are printed in plain black and white; others are printed in blue or in red, while a few are tinted. The price of the tinted copies of the *Jerusalem*, Gilchrist informs us, was twenty guineas. Both works are written in his peculiar rhythmical, or as Swinburne fittingly calls it, "choral," prose, though

in each the poet occasionally breaks forth into verse.

These were the last of Blake's prophetic works that saw the light, with the exception of the *Ghost of Abel*, which was issued in 1822. This work, it has been said, was written and engraved as early as 1788. There does not appear to be any very tangible evidence of the fact, however; while from internal evidence (it being dedicated to Byron for one thing) it would seem to have been inspired by that poet's *Mystery of Cain*, which, it will be remembered, was published in 1821.

Blake was now destined to go through some painful experiences. Soon after his return to London he fell into sad straits, and was "reduced so low as to be obliged to live on a half-guinea a week." This is the statement of one Cromek, an engraver who had turned print-seller and publisher, and who now came in contact with the artist, and saw in him a good subject for his speculative genius. A great deal of unnecessary vituperation has been expended upon this man, whose only fault was that he proved a very keen tradesman. To read the scathing words poured upon his head, one would think that he had invented sharp practice in business. Let us be just. The man acted up to his lights and in accordance with the spirit of his time—and our time. Be it his who has never acted harshly, nor over-reached his neighbour—be it his to join the stone-throwers.

The facts as regards Cromek's treatment of Blake were these. During the years 1804 and 1805, the celestial artist, with that indomitable industry of his

that was for ever seeking new realms of labour, produced a series of twelve drawings illustrative of Blair's *Grave*. It was Blake's intention to have engraved and published them himself, but Cromek, seeing and admiring, agreed to purchase them for a projected edition of the poem; it being part of the agreement that the designer should also be the engraver. The amount paid for the drawings was twenty guineas—a paltry sum for such works, “the most original designs of the century,” as Gilchrist truly styles them, which would only have been made a “tolerably adequate” remuneration by the addition of the payment for the engraving. But out of that the artist was defrauded.

It had clearly been Cromek's first intention to employ Blake to do the engraving, for so the prospectus, issued in 1805, intimates; but he had been a pupil of Bartolozzi, and was infected by his graceful line, which was, besides, much more admired by the public than Blake's old-fashioned and more austere style. He accordingly “repented him” of his bargain with the designer, quietly threw him over, and engaged Schiavonetti, apparently a fellow-apprentice of Cromek's, to do the work. Blake was naturally greatly incensed at this treatment, but having had nothing but a verbal agreement with Cromek, there was no help.

This, however, was not the worst treatment he received at Cromek's hands. For while the illustrations for the *Grave* were being executed, Cromek, calling upon Blake, had sight of a pencil drawing of a new subject upon which he was engaged, namely,

“Chaucer’s Pilgrims on the Road to Canterbury.” According to J. T. Smith, the dealer appeared highly delighted with the sketch. He would fain have obtained a finished drawing from it, so that he might get it engraved, as he had done the *Grave*, by another artist. Blake, however, was not to be had in that way a second time, and so the negotiations on that head fell through. But here a difficulty arises, for while Blake appears to have understood, and always asserted, that Cromek gave him an order to execute the design of which the pencil drawing was but a sketch; the latter, as though no such understanding existed, went to Stothard, suggested the “Canterbury Pilgrims” as a subject, and finished by giving him a commission for an oil-painting, to be engraved, for which he was to receive sixty guineas; and this although he must have known that a subscription paper for an engraving of Blake’s “Pilgrims” had already been issued by Blake’s friends.

In short, poor simple Blake was taken in again, and at first he did not know it. While Stothard was at work on his picture, Blake called upon him and saw it, ignorant, and unsuspecting even, that it was being done at Cromek’s suggestion, and that it was to take the place of his own. According to Stothard, he praised the picture, and expressed himself as pleased at seeing it. Even its acknowledged resemblance to his own did not surprise him. Such innocence is almost incomprehensible.

When Blake came to see how matters really stood, however, his indignation against Cromek knew no

bounds. Nor was his wrath against Stothard much less vehement, believing, as he did, that he had knowledge of and was a party to Cromek's treachery.¹ One would gladly give Stothard the benefit of the doubt, and believe with Flaxman that he was not a knowing and willing aider and abettor of the print-seller's perfidy. But it is hard to believe that he was altogether innocent.

The breach thus occasioned between the two men was never healed. Stothard resented Blake's imputations, assumed the tone of a deeply injured man, and refused ever after to be reconciled, though Blake, contrite and forgiving, twice made advances with that object in view.

Stothard's *Pilgrimage* was publicly exhibited in the spring of 1807, and attracted many visitors. It was subsequently engraved—though not until after Cromek's death—and became exceedingly popular. In the meantime, Blake's design had been finished, exhibited, and engraved. The announcement at the end of Blair's *Grave* of the forthcoming publication of Stothard's *Pilgrimage*, seconded, as Gilchrist thinks, by a jibe contained in an insolent and unfeeling letter from Cromek, caused Blake to set to work and complete his picture, with a view to exhibiting it—along with others—as Stothard had done his. It was in

It should be said that Stothard, on his part, with equal warmth declared that "Blake had commenced his picture in rivalry of himself," and also that on Blake's visit to Stothard during the early stage of the picture, the latter expressed his intention of introducing the poet's portrait in the procession.

the style which the artist designated "fresco," and was exhibited, together with other paintings and water-colours, in May, 1809, on the first floor of his brother's shop in Broad Street.

Never surely was such an exhibition got together before or since. It consisted of sixteen "poetical and historical inventions," nine of them being what he calls "frescoes," in reality, tempera-paintings, and seven drawings. Chief amongst the former was, of course, the "Canterbury Pilgrims." Many of the others have disappeared altogether from view, and so cannot be judged; but one of them has fortunately found its way into the National Gallery, and may therefore be seen and admired; for that "The Spiritual Form of Pitt Guiding Behemoth" is admirable for many great and sterling qualities, can hardly be disputed. Of another picture exhibited, called "The Ancient Britons," now lost, we have valuable contemporary testimony; among the few visitors being Mr. Seymour Kirkup, a gentleman of great intelligence and fine artistic perceptions, whose judgment upon this work, given by Mr. Swinburne, is that it "was the very noblest of all Blake's works." It represented the only three Britons who escaped from King Arthur's last battle. These were "the strongest man, the beautifullest man, and the ugliest man," who "marched through the field unsubdued, as gods," embodying, in short, one of the poet's great allegorical ideas.

In connection with this exhibition, Blake issued one of the most interesting and characteristic of his prose compositions. This was the famous *Descriptive*

Catalogue, which is as important for the light it throws upon the poet's character and aims as anything he ever wrote. It is a remarkable production in many ways, and not the least so on account of the criticism it contains of Chaucer as a delineator of character. The fee for admission to this singular exhibition, including a catalogue, was half-a-crown. Not many half-crowns were taken; but amongst those who were attracted to it were several men of note, including Mr. Henry Crabb Robinson, Charles Lamb, and Robert Southey, who makes reference to it in his *Doctor*. Lamb "preferred Blake's 'Canterbury Pilgrims' to Stothard's," characterising it as "A work of wonderful power and spirit, hard and dry, yet with grace." The author of *Elia* was delighted also with the analysis of the characters in the prologue contained in the *Catalogue*, which he pronounced "the finest criticism of Chaucer's poems he had ever read."

Not to be outdone, if possible, by Cromek, Blake, on opening his exhibition, issued a prospectus of his proposed engraving of the "Pilgrims," the original of which was acquired by Mr. Butts, putting the price to subscribers at four guineas. Although but few subscriptions were received, the engraving appeared in October, 1810, a year or two before Stothard's rival print could be issued. The latter, however, had a remarkable sale; a fact which, together with the bad odour in which his quarrel with the artist placed Blake with many, no doubt helped to embitter his mind, for a time at least, and caused him to suffer in many ways,

but chiefly in purse. People became shy of him, and an increasing number began to set him down as mad.

The *Descriptive Catalogue*, taken in conjunction with Blake's notes to Sir Joshua Reynold's *Discourses on Art* and the *Public Address* designed to accompany the engraving of the "Canterbury Pilgrims," is of the utmost importance as a means of enabling us to understand his views on art. It is, however, a perplexing and not unpainful field to enter upon, as we here find the artist showing the weakest side of his character—the one upon which, it would appear, there had been no growth since childhood. For, mingled with the loftiest thoughts, and with the soundest ideas in relation to art, we meet with outbursts of petulance and prejudice, the fruit of ignorance, that would have called for reprimand in a child. Take, for instance, his denunciation of Correggio as "a soft and effeminate and consequently a most cruel demon, whose whole delight is to cause endless labour to whoever suffers him to enter his mind." In the like manner Rubens is set down as "a most outrageous demon."

In other places Stothard and Flaxman are denounced. "Flaxman cannot deny that one of the first monuments he did I gratuitously designed for him ; at the same time he was blasting my character as an artist to Macklin, my employer, as Macklin told me at the time, and posterity will know." Again, in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, we read : "The painter hopes that his friends Anytus, Melitus and Lycon, will perceive that they are not now in ancient Greece ; and, though they can use the poison of calumny, the English

public will be convinced that such a picture as this could never be painted by a madman, or by one in a state of outrageous manners'; as these bad men both print and publish by all the means in their power."

All this is very pitiable as coming from a man of Blake's stamp and genius, and might make one doubt the wisdom of his judgment in higher matters, did not the insignia of heaven and the trumpet-blasts of its hosts always in some way accompany and attest the manifestations of its gifts.

Better worth noting are his pronouncements in relation to art pure and simple. To those who object to his mode of representing spirits with real bodies he replies: "A spirit and a vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour or a nothing; they are organised and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce. He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than his perishing mortal eye can see, does not imagine at all. The painter of this work asserts that all his imaginations appear to him infinitely more perfect and more minutely organised than anything seen by his mortal eye. Spirits are organised men." He vehemently contends for a sharp drawing of the figure as against those who "wish to draw figures without lines, and with great and heavy shadows." As is common with Blake, he puts his position in the most unmistakable manner. "The distinction that is made in modern times between a painting and a drawing proceeds from ignorance of art. The merit of a picture is the

same as the merit of a drawing. The dauber daubs his drawings; he who draws his drawings draws his pictures. There is no difference between Raphael's cartoons and his frescoes or pictures, except that the frescoes or pictures are more finished." "The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: that the more distinct, sharp, and wiry the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art: and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism, and bungling."

Of some of his pictures he says: "These . . . were the result of temptations and perturbations, labouring to destroy imaginative power, by means of that infernal machine, called Chiaroscuro, in the hands of Venetian and Flemish demons." "The spirit of Titian was particularly active in raising doubts concerning the possibility of executing without a model; and when he had once raised the doubt, it became easy for him to snatch away the vision time after time; for when the artist took his pencil to execute his ideas, his power of imagination weakened so much and darkened, that memory of nature and of pictures of the various schools possessed his mind, instead of appropriate execution resulting from the inventions."

Of course, in speaking of the spirit of Titian as *snatching away the vision*, he means that while under the influence of the great Venetian's pictures he was so possessed, or obsessed, by them that he could not realise his own conceptions without models; at least, such one would take to be his meaning. But that he may have meant what he says in the literal sense of

the word is open to belief ; for in the *Descriptive Catalogue* he says : “ Unworthy men, who gain fame among men, continue to govern mankind after death, and, in their spiritual bodies, oppose the spirits of those who worthily are famous ; and, as Swedenborg observes, by entering into disease and excrement, drunkenness and concupiscence, they possess themselves of the bodies of mortal men, and shut the doors of mind and of thought, by placing learning above inspiration.”

III.

THE seven or eight years succeeding the issue of the engraving of the "Canterbury Pilgrims" was a time of deepening gloom for the mystic poet and artist. One after another of his friends dropped away—some into the inevitable womb of death,—while but few fresh ones appeared to take their place. He published little or nothing, though he continued producing. He wrote more, he declared, during these years than Shakespeare and Milton put together; but he appealed to publishers in vain; and, as he was tired of engraving and printing privately, for a circulation on so small a scale that it could never pay him, his MSS. continued to accumulate year after year—to be eventually either destroyed or scattered to the four winds. Only one of his unpublished works of any size belonging to the prophetic series has been spared to us. This is *Vala*, which he gave to his friend Linnell in these later years.¹ Gradually he turned more and more from

¹ Concerning this MS., Messrs. Ellis and Yeats make an unwarrantable statement in their *Memoir* saying that Linnell's own family do not know how it "escaped and found safe keeping" with him. They know perfectly well what their father always said respecting it, namely, that it was given to him by Blake. Nor is there any ground for the suggestion that it was a death-bed gift.

the slights and neglect of the world to the relief and consolation afforded him by the spiritual world, and, undoubtedly, as the years went on, found deeper and more assured peace in the contemplation of divine things. "I want nothing whatever," he said to Mr. Crabb Robinson. "I am quite happy."

Is it not significant of much that during this time he produced the series of designs by which he is best known, and will continue, perhaps, to be known to all succeeding generations? I refer to his twenty-one *Inventions to the Book of Job*, which, all things considered, must be regarded as constituting his greatest work and his noblest title to fame as an original and inventive artist. No one can look at them without being strongly impressed by the man's deep spiritual insight and power of realisation. These designs were executed in water-colour, and were purchased by Mr. Butts, being among the last works acquired by that gentleman. This was in 1821, but how long they had been in hand we do not know—certainly as early as 1820, if not earlier.

Soon after Mr. Butts' purchase of them, the *Inventions* were replaced in Blake's hands, in order that he might show them to others, and, if possible, obtain commissions for duplicate sets. He found only one person disposed to give him an order; this was John Linnell, afterwards famous as a landscape painter, but then a young and struggling artist, making his living chiefly by portrait painting and engraving, and destined thenceforth to the end to be the chief support of the wonderful old man.

Linnell had been introduced to Blake by Mr. George Cumberland, of Bristol, in 1818. He found him, as he states in his autobiography, with "scarcely enough employment to live by at the prices he could obtain." He says further :—" We soon became intimate, and I employed him to help me with an engraving of my portrait of Mr. Upton, a Baptist preacher, which he was glad to do." ¹ One or two other small commissions Blake received from his new friend, who soon learned greatly to respect and admire him.

In 1823, Linnell, in order to find the poet employment, gave him a commission to engrave the *Job* series. The agreement (dated March 25) stipulates that Blake shall engrave the set of plates, which are to be paid for at the rate of £5 per plate ; also that Linnell shall pay Blake a further £100 out of the profits of the work, "as the receipts will admit of it." No profits arising from the engravings, however, Linnell generously gave him an extra £50. The £150 thus accruing to Blake for the *Job* plates were paid to him by instalments of a few pounds at a time from March, 1823, to October, 1825. The plates received their finishing touches in November, 1825, and the work was published and issued in March, 1826.

In the meantime—that is, in 1825—Linnell had directed his friend's attention to Dante's *Divina Commedia*, and suggested the drawing of a series of designs to illustrate it. Blake was delighted with the idea, and at once closed with the offer, and began to

¹ *Life of John Linnell*, vol I., p. 159.

study Italian, in order to read the poem in the original. In a few weeks' time he had mastered the language sufficiently for his purpose, and he went to work upon the designs. The agreement between the two was to the effect that Blake was to proceed with the work, doing as much or as little as he liked, and that Linnell was to go on paying him, as hitherto, two or three pounds a week, according to his needs, until they were finished, the sum paid in all (from the latter part of 1825, through 1826, to August 2, 1827) amounting to about £103.¹ The designs are in water-colours, and number one hundred in all. While many of them are finished, others are the reverse, some six or seven being pencil sketches with very little colour, while some three or four are mere pencil sketches.

It cannot be said that these designs, taken as a whole, come up to the *Job* series, though in some respects they manifest a depth and grandeur of conception not approached by the latter. We see in them all Blake's worst faults reproduced; in some cases these faults are even more pronounced and exaggerated than ever. Nor can one wonder, considering his failing health and the fact that many of them were done while he was in bed. But when all this has been said, and every deduction made, one must still acknowledge

¹ After Blake's death, Mr. Linnell paid to his widow various sums from September, 1827, to September, 1828, amounting to about £25 (including £10 10s. for his funeral, rent, etc.), making a total of about £130, which sum was to be refunded to him if the Dante were sold for the benefit of Mrs. Blake.

their marvellous power, both as representations of Dante's grim Underworld, and as manifestations of his own creative imagination. In comparison with them, Flaxman's designs are puny, and Doré's grotesque and feeble. There is, indeed, nothing in English art exhibiting at once so much vigour and originality of conception, and such an acute faculty of realising to the eye the wild, weird, and horrible of the land of dreams. These designs alone would entitle Blake to a foremost place in the ranks of original and imaginative art.

Linnell's commission to the artist included the engraving of the illustrations, and seven of the designs were executed in copper ; but beyond that the work never went, death overtaking the designer while still in the midst of his labour. The original drawings, as well as the engraved plates, are still in the possession of the Linnell family.

Through his intimacy with Linnell, Blake was introduced to an entirely fresh circle of friends and acquaintance. Amongst others with whom he was thus brought into contact were John Varley, Henry Richter, and James Holmes, all artists of note in their day ; the first-named especially so, he being one of the founders of the new school of water-colour painting. "From the works of the last two," says Gilchrist, "Blake learned to add greater fulness and depth of colour to his drawings, such, indeed, as he, bred in the old school of slight tints, had hardly thought could have been developed in this branch of art."

It was in Varley, however, that he found the most congenial spirit—a man devoted to occult studies, and

one who believed in astrology and kindred "sciences." A warm friendship sprang up between the two, and Blake was a frequent visitor at Varley's house, where the subject of the mystic's spiritual experiences frequently came up for discussion. According to Linnell, "Varley believed in the reality of Blake's visions more than even Blake himself;"¹ and as regards the "Visionary Heads," drawn by the latter for Varley, and in his presence, of which so much has been made by all Blake's biographers, the former believed that his friend actually saw the spirits of the men he drew as they still live in the abodes of the departed. He would strain his eyes trying to see what Blake saw; but the vision was never given to him. Of the number produced, Linnell purchased thirty-six, and they are still in the family's keeping.

Another person with whom Blake became acquainted in these later years was Mr. Henry Crabb Robinson, whose *Reminiscences*, along with the poet-artist's own letters to Mr. Butts, afford us the deepest insight into his character of anything we have. He first met Mr. Robinson at the house of Mr. Aders, in Euston Square, whither he had been taken by Linnell. The meeting occurred in December, 1825, and between that date and his death, Mr. Robinson saw and conversed with Blake a number of times. The substance of these talks, and the impressions derived therefrom, are given in the *Reminiscences*, which are invaluable as "document" in regard to the life of the poet; albeit their

¹ *Life of John Linnell*, vol. I., p. 162.

worth is somewhat lessened by the circumstance that the writer not only seems to have met the subject of his remarks with a prepossession in favour of his insanity, but also to have set down his observations with a view to support that theory.

“Shall I call Blake artist, genius, mystic, or madman?” he begins by asking; adding, “Probably he is all.” Mr. Robinson then reports the following conversation: “When he said ‘my visions,’ it was in the ordinary unemphatic tone in which we speak of everyday matters. In the same tone he said repeatedly, ‘The Spirit told me.’ I took occasion to say, ‘You express yourself as Socrates used to do. What resemblance do you suppose there is between your spirit and his?’ ‘The same as between our countenances.’ He paused and added, ‘I was Socrates,’ and then, as if correcting himself, ‘a sort of brother. I must have had conversations with him. So I had with Jesus Christ. I have an obscure recollection of being with both of them.’” In further conversation on the duty of Jesus, Blake said: “He is the only God. But then,” he added, “so am I, and so are you.”

These and similar dark sayings, to which he seems to have been fond of giving utterance, are the main ground upon which the theory of Blake’s madness is based. But strange as were many of his opinions on these and many other cognate subjects, reasonable explanations of them may be found in his metaphysical doctrines, without resorting to the hypothesis of insanity. Moreover, if views strongly at variance with commonly accepted beliefs are to be taken as

proof of madness, then many of our leading minds have been stamped with mental malady.

In 1821, Blake had removed his domicile from South Molton Street to No. 3 Fountain Court, Strand, where he occupied the first floor. It was his last abode, and, one would think, the least salubrious, being close to the then muddy and filth-reeking bank of the Thames. During his residence here he was a frequent visitor to Linnell's house at Hampstead, generally on Sundays, when he always found a hearty welcome. There he met, or sometimes walked from town with one or other of a group of young men devoted to art, who afterwards constituted themselves his disciples. Among them were Samuel Palmer (subsequently Linnell's son-in-law), George Richmond (afterwards the Academician), Edward Calvert, and Frederick Tatham, to the last of whom we owe much of what we know of Blake's later years.

These Sundays at Hampstead were always very pleasant ones to the poet, despite his oft-repeated assertion that Hampstead and the northern suburbs of London generally were inimical to his physical well-being. He used frequently to complain of being unwell after these visits, and once when Mrs. Linnell observed that the place was healthy, he brusquely replied, "It is a lie!" He continued to visit his friend, nevertheless, and took especial delight in the company of his children, some of whom, now grown ripe in years, still remember the wonderful old man, with his pleasant voice, his white hair, and his large beautiful eyes full of spiritual light. Linnell's

cottage looked over the Heath, and Blake would often stand at the door for half an hour at a time gazing upon the varied scene of woodland and moor, especially when transformed as it were into a land of mystery and dream by the setting sun.

At length the time arrived when it became a toil to go so far as Hampstead, and when, if he did venture thither, it had to be in a carriage. In November, 1825, in a letter to Linnell, he says, "I cannot get well, and am now in bed, but seem as if I should be better to-morrow." A few months later he speaks of being "laid up by a cold in the stomach," which he attributes to the Hampstead air. In the summer of 1826, Linnell took a lodging for him and Mrs. Blake at Hampstead, thinking a week or two's sojourn would do him good. But it was evident his constitution was breaking up. Though naturally a very good one, the hard struggle he had been obliged to wage for bread, his incessant industry, and the disappointments to which he had been subjected, had tried it to the utmost. In May, 1826, he had "another desperate shivering fit," which "began by a gnawing pain in the stomach," causing "a deathly feeling all over the limbs." In a letter written on the 3rd of July, 1827, another attack is referred to as coming on after his return from Hampstead. He appears never to have rallied after this. His physical powers gradually waned, so that he was obliged to remain in bed most of the time. Happily, he was for the most part without pain, and was able, while propped up with pillows, to continue his work on the Dante designs.

His last days were strikingly in keeping with his whole life. We owe our chief account of them to Frederick Tatham, whose biographical details, written on the fly-leaves of his copy of the *Jérusalem*, are of great value. The last works upon which he was engaged appear to have been a coloured drawing of the *Ancient of Days*, previously referred to as one of the illustrations in the prophecy of *Europe*, and a sketch of his wife. The drawing was done for Tatham, who had offered to pay him three guineas and a half for a coloured copy. Referring thereto, Tatham says: "After he had frequently touched upon it and had frequently held it at a distance, he threw it from him, and with an air of exulting triumph exclaimed, 'There! that will do—I cannot mend it.' Then, seeing his wife in tears, he cried, 'Stay! Kate, keep as you are. You have ever been an angel to me; I will draw you;'" the result being, in Mr. Tatham's words, "a frenzied sketch of some power—highly interesting, but not like."

The end came on the 12th of August, 1827. Three months more would have completed his seventieth year. His death was one of those beautiful occurrences of which we sometimes hear, but which it is rarely the lot of man to see. Smith reports it as he had it from the widow. "On the day of his death," he says, "he composed and uttered songs to his Maker, so sweetly to the ear of his Catherine, that when she stood to hear him, he, looking upon her most affectionately, said, 'My beloved! they are not mine. No! they are not mine!' He told her they would not be parted; he should always be about her to take care of her."

Another account says: "He said he was going to that country he had all his life wished to see, and expressed himself happy, hoping for salvation through Jesus Christ. Just before he died, his countenance became fair, his eyes brightened, and he burst out into singing of the things he saw in heaven." He finally passed away towards six in the evening—so calmly and peacefully, that the devoted wife, who sat by his bedside, could not fix the precise moment of decease. Along with her, the only other witness of the solemn scene, was a female neighbour, who afterwards told how she had been "at the death, not of a man, but of a blessed angel."

On the Friday following, his remains were laid, by his own express wish, by the side of his parents and other relatives, in Bunhill Fields cemetery. The grave was a common unpurchased one, and was marked by no memorial. Efforts were made later to identify it, but in vain. Four years afterwards (October, 1831), Mrs. Blake took her place by his side.

The "wonderful man," as the devoted widow was wont to call him, left a large number of MSS., unsold pictures, engravings, and books. The sale of the engraved books and drawings helped to sustain Mrs. Blake during the few years that remained to her ere she joined him whose spirit, according to his promise, was ever with her. The residue she bequeathed to Mr. Tatham, who, it is pitiful to relate, was so unfaithful to the trust reposed in him, and to the memory of the man whose disciple he pretended to be, that he allowed himself to be persuaded by the narrow sectaries—

Irvingites, according to John Linnell¹—to whom he had joined himself, to destroy the whole or the major part of them, as being, though undoubtedly inspired, of the impious inspiration of the devil.

Poor Blake! harassed and gagged in the delivery of his message during his life-time, he could not be spared this further indignity—and at the hand of a trusted disciple—after death! Thus do we, even in our day, stone our prophets.

Such was the life, and to some extent the character, of the man who was during the years of his earthly pilgrimage, and still remains, an enigma to the world. But before we can understand him and his works aright, it will be necessary to gain some further insight into his nature, which, though simple in the main, presents many complexities, as well as some apparent contradictions, that rendered it at times very difficult to comprehend. This arises from the fact that, like most men of great intellect, he possessed many facets to his mind. Nor was he like the diamond that has been highly wrought and polished, and for that reason shows to advantage under every light; he resembled rather a rough untouched gem that shines by its own effulgence alone, dazzling by its bright coruscations under certain lights, while under others it is dull and irresponsive.

In other words, in trying to estimate Blake's place and work, we must bear in mind that he was in the technical sense of the term an uneducated man. He

¹ *Life, supra.*

never had the advantages of a systematic scholastic training ; and though he read and assimilated much, yet even in that he retained to the last the disadvantages of the self-educated or partially instructed man. His imperfections in this respect left their stamp upon nearly everything he did, not only upon his writings, but upon his art also.

It has been the fashion in some quarters to represent self-education as the best. But admirable as it is in lieu of a better, it always breeds defects and lacunæ that for ever handicap a man in the race. There is something in the education of the school or college, with its concomitant rubbing together of wits, and, one may add, the clash of temperaments, that produces upon the mind and character something of the effect the lapidary's work has upon the gem ; it reduces crudities and excrescences, subdues abnormalities, and softens and harmonises the whole to a more uniform excellence of result. It cannot bring out where there is nothing, and its effect on the puny or mediocre is often far worse than the result of self-training upon those of a larger and grander mould of mind, inasmuch as it narrows and stultifies what little intellect there is. Such baneful effects we see, especially upon literature, every day.

It has often been said that a man can never wholly make up for the lack of being "well kicked" in a public school. Though brutally stated, there is much truth in the remark. A youth learns by such rough contact as he gets in school to know and recognise his limitations ; he sees in those of others his own imper-

fections, and is gradually brought to feel the need of checking the defects of his temper, either from the example of his fellows or by reason of the rude shocks he receives in consequence of the collisions it occasions with them. In short, his school or college mates are more than half the schoolmaster. After a person has reached the age of maturity, and his habits have become set, his defects harden, as it were, and can never afterwards be eradicated. For the lack of such wholesome discipline many a man's character, and often his career, have been greatly marred, if not completely spoiled. That Blake suffered greatly from this cause there can be no doubt.

Another characteristic, which doubtless rose to a large extent from his solitary habits and home education, was what Mr. Rossetti designates his "measureless and rather provoking self-applause." His letters and other writings, especially the *Descriptive Catalogue*, are full of examples of this sort of thing. "I have now given two years to the intense study of those parts of the art which relate to light, and shade, and colour," he says in a letter to Mr. Butts (1802); "and am convinced that either my understanding is incapable of comprehending the beauty of colouring, or the pictures which I painted for you are equal in every part of the art, and superior in one, to anything that has been done since the age of Raphael. . . I also know and understand, and can assuredly affirm, that the works I have done for you are equal to the Caracci or Raphael. . . I say they are equal to the Caracci or Raphael; or else I am blind, stupid,

ignorant, and incapable, in two years' study, to understand those things which a boarding-school miss can comprehend in a fortnight. . . I do not pretend to be perfect, yet, if my works have faults, the Caraccis, Correggios and Raphaels have faults also." In the *Catalogue*, he writes: "Mr. Blake's powers of invention very early engaged the attention of many persons of eminence and fortune; by whose means he has been regularly enabled to bring before the public, works (he is not afraid to say) of equal magnitude and consequence with the productions of any age or country." Much more in the same vein of self-praise might be cited, and though not a little of it is true enough in fact, it is not always pleasant to hear the egoistic trumpet sounded so loud.

But as character and the prevailing bent of mind depend very much upon the predominant faculty or faculties, the first question that arises in regard to Blake is naturally as to the cause or origin of that peculiar power or quality of mind, that idiosyncrasy, which chiefly distinguished him from his fellows. I refer, of course, to his power of seeing visions. Was it this spiritual or supernatural endowment that caused him to be so different from other men? Was it this that made him so different as a poet from other poets?—so different as an artist from other artists? Was he otherwise constituted mentally than other men? Or was the difference between him and them one of degree only? One of his disciples has described him as a "new kind of man." There was something so essentially different in him to what there

is, or appeared to Finch¹ to be, in ordinary men, that Blake struck him as being of a new order of beings.

Such, indeed, he appears to most of those who study and make themselves acquainted with his life and works. To those who give but a glance and no more, the glib and ready theory that he was mad is ever sufficient. It explains everything at once and so concisely, with a word, that nothing more—to them—is needed.

To those, however, who are bound by their nature to think and reason, the theory of madness, even if accepted, does not lessen the difficulty. Nay, it rather creates one enigma the more. For when did madman do such work as he did? When before did madman go through life so honourably and consistently, fulfilling all its duties and requirements, and labouring with such undeviating assiduity—with such sublimity of purpose and result—as he did?

The world is ever ready to set down as madness, or as proof of madness, that which is different in kind or degree to what is ordinarily met with in everyday life. Whenever an individual has laid claim to the possession of powers beyond those of the common run of mortals, his contemporaries have been quick to stigmatise him as insane. It would not be difficult to find parallels to Blake's case—to point out men and women who, because of some abnormal gift, some visionary or prophetic power like his, have been held to be mad, and too often treated as such, by the un-

¹ Francis Oliver Finch, the artist, one of his disciples.

thinking, as he was. Even Jesus was "possessed of a devil."

The theory of "possession" has for the most part been discarded ; but we have still ages to make up as regards our notions touching insanity. More than a hundred years ago Gall propounded his doctrine of the plurality and localisation of the mental powers, and demonstrated by a multitude of observations and experiments that this is the true theory of the brain and its functions. But, notwithstanding that every advance in our knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the brain has tended more and more to establish this important fact, the "scientific" mind still stands aloof and, without examination, condemns it as false. Yet certain it is that, whatever fallacies may have become bound up with the theory, herein lies a fundamental principle of mentality. By it alone can we explain the manifold phases of mind, memory, reason, observation, sympathy, love, conscience, revenge, fear, friendship, hope, reverence, faith, imagination, spirituality, and a score of other primary powers ; by it alone is explicable the varied phenomena of special gifts, criminality, genius, insanity and so forth.

This, however, is not the place to enter upon an explanation and advocacy of Gall's theory. Suffice it to show that by that theory Blake's mental condition becomes clear and explicit. That system of psychology recognises an "organ" of the brain whose function it is to deal with spiritual matters, or spiritual truths. As the existence of an organ necessarily implies the state or condition whose function it is to recognise,

so the existence of such a mental organ presupposes that of a spiritual or supermundane state to which it relates.

One of the leading doctrines of Blake's metaphysical system is, that man is essentially a spiritual being adapted to a spiritual state, but that through his infatuation for, and worship of, Nature, he has become degraded from his original condition of spiritual purity, and has even forfeited the power of seeing or recognising anything beyond his physical environment; in short, to quote his own phrase, he has become "imprisoned in his five senses;" his spiritual sense having become atrophied, and so gradually lost through indifference and neglect. To Blake, however, this spiritual sense, or eye, had been vouchsafed; he, therefore, was permitted to see into what was a closed book, or a closed world, to others. This to him was the real world—the world of the spiritual or imaginative side of man; for, as he frequently puts it, "all things exist in the human imagination;" nothing, indeed, is real outside of it. To him this side of things was ever present—the one actual, essential fact of existence; and so impressed was he with its importance to man, that he conceived it to be his duty, his mission, to reinstate man in this lost world, to re-establish him in this forfeited inheritance. This, if looked at closely, will be found to be the main drift and purpose of all Blake's arcane prophecies.

Thus far all is clear. His theory of the universe with the conception of imagination (in the spiritual sense) as the only real and eternal world, is sufficient

to afford a reasonable explanation of his most startling assertions—as, for instance, that he must have conversed with Jesus—time and space having no existence to the spiritual sense. But when it comes to the carrying out of his mission, then the mortal, “vegetable” instrument of mind gives way, and we have the spectacle of a prophet struggling with the burthen of a message too great for his utterance. The might and majesty of his vision overwhelms him. Image after image, thought after thought, presses upon his brain. He attempts to set them down in writing; but they are too vast and inchoate in form, too vehement and “angry” in action, for human speech; and so we have a result that is to us fragmentary and incoherent. Doubtless, to him, what he wrote suggested and brought back the complete and perfect vision; possibly others, with his “faculty divine,” might see the whole from his imperfect symbols.

The explanation of this condition is, that there was a want of balance betwixt the spiritual or visionary faculty and the power of expression. At times his verse flows along clearly and harmoniously enough—the stress of imagination is not too great for the faltering tongue to follow, and the feeble pen to record. Anon, the brain becomes heated under the fervour of the vision; thought kindles thought, idea begets idea, and in fire and flame they leap from line to line.

“Again he speaks in thunder and in fire,
Thunder of thought and flames of fierce desire.”

Still the "vegetable" tongue is not too feeble for the tax put upon it. But with the continued rush of blood to the brain the whirl of thought becomes terrific, the visions hustle one upon another, the demons "howl;" there is a chaos of sound and fury. The frenzied prophet, however faithful to his trust, still labours with the weak mortal instrument at his command to set down the revelation. What wonder if he be at times incoherent, incomprehensible! The marvel would be if he were not.

Such, in brief, is all that Blake's alleged insanity amounted to. It was a lack of mental balance arising from a preponderance of the spiritual or imaginative faculty. Many men of his spiritual type have been alike "insane," though in a lesser degree. For in Blake it was not merely that he was gifted with this superabundance of the visionary eye, but he had a choleric and combustible temperament, that easily caught fire, and was apt to carry everything before it in an excess of flaming vehemence, or to obscure it in volumes of smoke and vapour.

While many have been possessed of powers similar to those of Blake, he is peculiar, if not unique, in that the visions began with his earliest childhood, and were not a development or an addition of his later years. Reference has been made to his vision of angels on Peckham Rye, when he was eight or ten years of age; but, according to a statement made by Mrs. Blake to Mr. Crabb Robinson, this was not his first or most remarkable vision. "You know, dear," said she, addressing her husband, "when you first saw God

was when you were four years old, and He put His head to the window and set you screaming."

Nor did the power of seeing visions ever leave him, but, on the contrary, grew and strengthened with his years. There was to him nothing abnormal or occasional about them; they were of almost daily occurrence; he lived with them, so to speak, as other people live with their ordinary friends and acquaintance. "The visions were angry with me at Felpham," he used to say at a later period, as though speaking of actual people.

To him the spiritual side of the universe was the most real and momentous; his temptation was to forget this fact and to repine. "I was commanded by my spiritual friends to bear all and be silent, and to go through all without murmuring," he says in one of his letters to Mr. Butts. "Though I have been very unhappy, I am so no longer. I am again emerged into the light of day." Later he writes: "If all the world should set their faces against this" (his "poetic pursuits"), "I have orders to set my face like a flint (Ezekiel iii. 8) against their faces, and my forehead against their foreheads."

In another of these invaluable letters he says: "If I had only depended on mortal things, both myself and my wife must have been lost. . . If we fear to do the dictates of our angels, and tremble at the tasks set before us; if we refuse to do spiritual acts because of natural fears or natural desires—who can describe the dismal torments of such a state! I too well remember the threats I heard."

While Blake held his "angels," or apparitions, as more real than the beings and things of earth—as, in truth, the only realities—he did not regard them as personalities so much as conditions, or, as we should say, abstractions. Such, at least, we gather to be his view, from assertions frequently made by him, and from what is reported of his sayings by others. Even when, during his residence at Felpham, he began to see individuals, we must take it that he did not represent or believe that he saw the actual spirits of the persons named, Moses, Milton, etc., but rather a picture of them, made vivid to the imagination.

“With my inward eye 'tis an old man grey ;
With my outward, a thistle across the way.”

The same explanation will apply to the "Visionary Heads" called up at will and drawn in pencil for John Varley.

Nor did he hold, if we may judge from what Linnell records of him, that in this power of seeing vision, he possessed anything abnormal, but rather that those from whom it is withheld are in the abnormal condition. He only claimed, says Linnell, the possession of some power, though in greater degree, that all men possess, but which they have undervalued and lost through the love of sordid pursuits, pride, vanity, and unrighteousness.

It will naturally ever remain a mystery how much of reality Blake attributed to his visions, and how much he recognised them as simple imaginations.

That he did not regard them as mere spectres, called up from the dead as by some Cagliostro necromancy, but rather as subjective impressions, revelations of the divine mind to his mind, is abundantly evident from his writings; but as if to make doubly sure that we should not misinterpret his views in this respect, he reveals to us, in the opening to *Milton*, the *modus operandi* of his prophetic power. After invoking the "Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the poet's song!" he proceeds:

"Come into my hand,

By your mild power descending down the Nerves of my right
arm

From out the Portals of my brain, where by your ministry
The Eternal Great Humanity Divine planted his Paradise
And in it caused the Spectres of the Dead to take sweet forms
In likeness of himself."

To the same purpose was his reply to a lady respecting an account given by him of a meadow wherein he had seen some lambs that turned out to be sculptured. She asked where he had witnessed this interesting sight. "Here, madam," he answered, placing his finger upon his forehead. To a similar subjective origin we most attribute the "fairies' funeral," of which Allan Cunningham gives an account as though in the poet's own words. He describes it as "a procession of creatures of the size and colour of green and grey grasshoppers, bearing a body laid out on a rose leaf, which they buried with songs, and then disappeared."

To a mind possessed of so prodigal a fancy, to which everything has a spiritual cause or origin, even digestion, it is easy to slip into superstition, and sometimes to attribute to supernatural or demoniacal agency things explainable by quite natural processes. This we find Blake doing more than once; but especially does he manifest this weakness when he asserts that some foul spell of Stothard's had caused the almost total obliteration of the original pencil sketch of his "Canterbury Pilgrims," which he had hung up in his living-room and left there, exposed to air and dust, for nearly a year.

Superstition, the love of paradox, and a disposition to puzzle and perplex people who approached him in a curious or captious spirit, as though to sound the depth of his "malady," will account for many of his hard and apparently inexplicable sayings. One seems to see the latter motive at work in some of the answers given to Mr. Crabb Robinson, who, notwithstanding his intelligence, appears to have gone about somewhat as an intellectual *gobemouche*. And this is the sort of thing with which Blake fed his curiosity. "You never saw the spiritual sun? I have. I saw him on Primrose Hill. He said: 'Do you take me for the Greek Apollo?' 'No: That,' pointing to the sky; 'that is the Greek Apollo; he is Satan!'"

At the same time it is open to the explanation that the saying contains one of Blake's symbolical meanings, of which he is so prodigal; though not to the extent, one must believe, of Messrs. Ellis and Yeats' symbolical system, which, if accepted, adds a further perplexity

to the study of Blake. That his mind was one to which everything had a symbolical meaning is undeniable ; but had he worked out such a vast and recondite system of symbolism we cannot but think that he would have given some hint or explanation of it to one or other of the highly intellectual and appreciative men, some of them ardent disciples, who were so constantly about him during his last few years.

In personal appearance Blake was low of stature and of slender build, with a high, pallid forehead, and dark and expressive eyes. His voice was low and musical, his manner gentle and unassuming, and his conversation "a singular mixture of knowledge and enthusiasm." He was unselfish to the last degree, and cared very little for money. "Were I to love money," he said, "I should lose all power of thought, and my business is not to gather gold, but to make glorious shapes, expressing godlike sentiments." Sometimes he would allow himself to become so absorbed in his imaginative work as to neglect the means of earning money. As soon as the larder became bare, his wife would quietly put an empty plate before him when the meal time came round. "What, no money again," he would exclaim ; "it's always the money—nothing but the money !" and at once go to work on the usual cash-producing drudgery.

IV.

WHILST much of what may be called Blake's "message" to mankind may and probably always will be open to question, there can be no doubt as to the value of that garland of richest poesy, which was the first fruit of his genius. Whether we regard the age of the poet, or the time at which he wrote, that is, before Cowper, and before Wordsworth or Burns, the *Poetical Sketches* are nothing less than astounding. The following lyric, said to have been written before he was fourteen years of age, it would be difficult to match by an equally youthful effusion in the whole realm of English poetry :

" How sweet I roamed from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride,
Till I the Prince of Love beheld
Who in the sunny beams did glide.

" He showed me lilies for my hair,
And blushing roses for my brow ;
He led me through his gardens fair
Where all his golden pleasures grow.

" With sweet May-dews my wings were wet,
And Phœbus fired my vocal rage ;
He caught me in his silken net,
And shut me in his golden cage.

“ He loves to sit and hear me sing,
Then, laughing, sports and plays with me;
Then stretches out my golden wing,
And mocks my loss of liberty.”

Not less admirable in their way are the “Mad Song,” quoted by Southey in his *Doctor*, and the verses “To the Muses.” It is surprising to think where the youth got his inspiration, until we learn from Malkin, who earliest called attention to his poetic gifts, that he was a diligent student of Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, *Tarquin and Lucrece*, and *Sonnets*, and of Ben Jonson’s *Underwoods* and *Miscellanies*. We know also from the evidence of the *Sketches* themselves that he dipped deeply into Spenser; albeit his “Imitation” of that poet, which forms part of the collection, can hardly be called an imitation at all. Of both Chatterton and Macpherson he was a great admirer, and owed much to each—certainly a great deal to the latter, whose *Ossian* had “taken the world by storm” in Blake’s youth. Though others scoffed and scouted, he remained true to his early love.

“I believe,” he writes in a note to Wordsworth’s *Supplementary Essay*, “both Macpherson and Chatterton; that what they say is ancient, is so.” And again, “I own myself an admirer of *Ossian* equally with any other poet whatever; of Rowley and Chatterton also.”

Of *Ossian* we seem to trace the influence in several of the less lyrical poems here, and it set its stamp of windy vapour and nebulous form in much of the

“prophetic” writing of later years. But in such poems as the one given above, in that commencing—

“My silks and fine array,”

and in—

“Love and harmony combine,”

we find the influence of a far deeper and purer fountain. Indeed, the best of Blake’s lyrics partake of the Elizabethan Muse more than of anything later. While in “Love and Harmony,” and many others, the metre is faulty, the poet has infused into them a rhythmical beauty that has seldom been equalled. It is as though he had permeated his verse with all the sweet and intangible beauties and delights of the garden and the grove. In this respect he is one of our sweetest and most natural singers; song comes to his lips as the ripple to the brook, as the scent to the rose; the thrush’s strain is not more innate and of itself than his. But while this is true of the best contained in the little book, it must be confessed there is also much chaff and straw with the good corn.

When we come to the *Songs of Innocence* we find the poems more equal as a whole, albeit there is nothing perhaps to excel in individual charm the more perfect ones of the *Sketches*. But it would be difficult, nay, impossible, to find in the whole range of poetry, whether English or foreign, a like number of poems of such high quality as they exhibit. We may like one better than another, or perhaps we should say we may

like one better than another at a given time and in a given mood, but let anyone with an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy the pure emanations of an innocent and childlike soul, and there is nothing here that will not at one time or another fill him with quiet raptures. Happily were they called *Songs of Innocence* ! If birds and babes and little children were able to put the delights of their hearts into words and utter speech, it would, one imagines, take the form of Blake's songs ; and if the young poet, unable to comprehend and translate their inarticulate lisplings for himself, will but go to this man with the visionary eye, he will find in him their truest interpreter.

Probably no true lover of poetry ever failed to be deeply impressed by the striking beauty of these poems. Their charm is in their childlike simplicity. Coming upon them for the first time is like chancing upon a scene of simple rural beauty, wherein children roam at play and call angels their parents.

We wonder at first where he gets the marvellous melody of his verse ; but the secret gradually reveals itself as being simply the natural spiritual effluence of joyous infancy. No man has been able to give with such truthfulness the naïve expression of childlike joy, or to put into words so perfect what one may term the fragrance of an infant's thought. Our language is rich with many songs redolent of happy childhood, but I can think of nothing quite capable of comparison for charm, alike of melody and of spirit, with the following :

“ Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me :

“ ‘ Pipe a song about a Lamb !’
So I piped with merry cheer.
“ ‘ Piper, pipe that song again ;’
So I piped : he wept to hear.

“ ‘ Drop thy pipe, thy merry pipe ;
Sing thy songs of happy cheer !’
So I sang the same again,
While he wept with joy to hear.

“ ‘ Piper, sit thee down and write
In a book, that all may read.’
So he vanished from my sight ;
And I plucked a hollow reed,

“ And I made a rural pen,
And I stained the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear.”

From the last line of this poem, which serves as introduction to the *Songs of Innocence*, it would appear that Blake intended the collection to be a little garland of verse for children ; but like all true, sincere, and perfect things, they appeal to the true heart of man under whatever guise of age or infirmity. In drinking in for the thousandth time their varied fragrance and melody, one is at a loss to decide which of the poems is the most perfect of its kind, not always perhaps in regard to finish and workmanship, for the

perfect craftsmen would find careless and faulty lines, that a little thought would have remedied, but in respect to the fulness and freshness of the breath of childhood and childlike nature with which his verses are, as it were, interfused. Who can read the two simple verses beginning "How sweet is the shepherd's sweet lot!" without having pictured to his mind, and feeling to his innermost heart, the idyllic charm and primitive simplicity of the pastoral life.

There is a similar and even a heightened charm in "The Lamb"—

" Little lamb, who made thee ?
Dost thou know who made thee,
Gave thee life, and bade thee feed
By the stream and o'er the mead ;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, woolly, bright ;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice ?
Little lamb, who made thee ?
Dost thou know who made thee ?"

One finds in this little garland—what it would be difficult to find in any similar collection anywhere—poems suitable for every mood and emotion of the innocent heart of childhood, from that of simple natural piety inculcated in the above—

" Little lamb, I'll tell thee :
He is called by thy name,
For He calls Himself a Lamb"—

to that of the pure joy that is expressed in the laughter of children :

“ When the meadows laugh with lively green,
And the grasshoppers laugh in the merry scene ;
When Mary, and Susan, and Emily
With their sweet round mouths sing, ‘ Ha, ha, he ! ’ ”

There is not, indeed, one of this charming collection that has not its own special beauty, and that might not be taught with advantage to every child in the land.

Some five years intervene betwixt the issue of the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience*, a short enough space in regard to time, but as regards thought, a vast gulf has been passed in those few years. During that brief interval, the innocent child has grown into the disillusioned man. He can no longer sing, as in the *Songs of Innocence* :

“ Oh, what a multitude they seemed, these flowers of London town !

Seated in companies they sit, with radiance all their own.
The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of lambs,
Thousands of little boys and girls raising their innocent hands.”

The same Holy Thursday fills him, in the *Songs of Experience*, with such thoughts as these :

“ Is this a holy thing to see
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babes reduced to misery,
Fed with cold and usurious hand ? ”

The two poems may be taken as stamping the difference between the *Innocence* and the *Experience*.

Nor is the query contained in the four lines from the latter the only one with which he startles us. Nearly all the questions with which his later writings are filled have their first glimmerings here, and, chief of these, that freedom of love which he claims, as by right of heritage, for the human soul :

“Break that heavy chain
That does freeze my bones around !
Selfish, vain,
Eternal bane,
That free love with bondage bound.”

Some of his adumbrations on this subject, though clothed in mystical language, are clear enough, and are sufficiently “advanced,” even in this day, to cause the more strait-laced and thought-tied of mortals metaphorically to draw up their skirts and pass over to the other side of the way. Nor can we wonder very greatly that a man who conceived it to be his mission to make such annunciation as we find in “A Little Girl Lost,” was in his day regarded as mad or worse. It is not given to everyone to perceive his meaning, and even many of those who would accept his general ideal might be pardoned for hesitating to follow it the length he suggests.

Here, too, we meet with the first undoubted evidences of his mysticism. In “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found,” in which it is most manifest, the symbolical language in which he sets forth his thought is not very deep ; still, it is not easy to comprehend, and many may miss the meaning.

But the loveliest things in the *Songs of Experience* are those that approximate nearest to the spirit and melody of the *Songs of Innocence*. Among these must be numbered the "Sunflower":

"Ah, Sunflower, weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the sun,
Seeking after that sweet golden clime,
Where the traveller's journey is done ;

"Where the youth pined away with desire,
And the pale virgin shrouded in snow,
Arise from their graves and aspire
Where my Sunflower wishes to go !"

Along with this must be reckoned "The Angel," in spite of its darkling, mystical thought. But these and all the other poems of this book of *Songs* pale and fade in glory before the magnificence of "The Tiger," which—so often quoted—must be quoted yet once more :

"Tiger, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Framed thy fearful symmetry ?

"In what distant deeps or skies
Burned that fire within thine eyes ?
On what wings dared he aspire ?
What the hand dared seize the fire ?

"And what shoulder and what art
Could twist the sinews of thy heart ?
When thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand formed thy dread feet ?

“What the hammer, what the chain,
Knit thy strength and forged thy brain?
What the anvil? What dread grasp
Dared thy deadly terrors clasp?

“When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the lamb make thee?”

Blake's latest biographers have represented this sublime poem as symbolical; and so of course it is, as all of the best poetry must be; but beyond that the true lovers of Blake will decline to accept the statement. Indeed, the great fault of Messrs. Ellis and Yeats' work is that they push this symbolism too far, and make too complex a system of it. Blake, we feel convinced, never evolved all that confused and laborious system; his genius was too intuitive, too instantaneous for that. The quality of "instantaneousness" is impressed indelibly on all he did. It leaves many a blot; but had he stopped to deliberate, to correct, to finish, the divine touch which is upon so much of his work would not have been there. It would simply have been like a great deal more poesy of his time, and of our time, perfect perhaps in form, but soulless and effete.

If Blake's poetical gift to the world consisted of the *Sketches* and *Songs of Innocence and Experience* alone, the final judgment upon his work would not be difficult to reach. Such, however, is not the case. Those delightful gardens of poetic gems form but a small

proportion of the product of his pen ; and it is the larger portion, the so-called Prophetic Books, that constitute the real difficulty in estimating his work. Their production ranges over a long series of years.

The first of them, *The Book of Thel*, appeared the same year as the *Songs of Innocence*, and was produced in the same way. Even this, the simplest and most comprehensible of the Prophetic Books, is not a poem for all. It is a piece of pure allegory, very beautiful, but mystical, and to some extent enigmatic. Thel, youngest of "the daughters of the Seraphim," by whom is probably meant humanity, or the pure soul of humanity, is afflicted with the thought of the transiency of life—"like music in the air,"—and in her bitterness complains. Then come to her first a lily of the valley, then a cloud, then other abstractions, to teach her the beauty of serviceableness and love. Her complaint is very sweetly expressed :

" Ah ! gentle may I lay me down, and gentle rest my head,
And gentle sleep the sleep of death, and gentle hear the
voice
Of Him that walketh in the garden in the evening time ! "

The answer of the lily is as charming in its beauty and simplicity as anything that Blake ever wrote. It exemplifies, moreover, that entire trustfulness in the Divine which so strikingly characterises the poet's philosophy from first to last :

" I am a watery weed,
And I am very small, and love to dwell in lowly vales ;

So weak, the gilded butterfly scarce perches on my head.
Yet I am visited from heaven ; and He that smiles on all
Walks in the valley, and each morn over me spreads his
hand,
Saying, ' Rejoice, thou humble grass, thou low-born lily-
flower,
Thou gentle maid of silent valleys and of modest brooks ;
For thou shalt be clothed in light, and fed with morning
manna,
Till summer's heat melts thee beside the fountains and the
springs,
To flourish in eternal vales.' "

To about the same period as *Thel* belongs the more rhapsodical and less lyrical poem *Tiriel*. It forms, as it were, a link between the tender allegory of *Thel* and the more daring and inchoate visions of the later prophetic writings. The distinction is the poet's own. "Allegory addressed to the intellectual powers," he tells us in one place, "while it is altogether hidden from the corporeal understanding, is my definition of the most sublime poetry." But in his notes on the Last Judgment, he says: "Fable or allegory is a totally distinct and inferior kind of poetry," whereas, "vision, or imagination, is a representation of what actually exists, really and unchangeably." We may take it that the contradiction in the two dicta is more apparent than real, and that by allegory he designated that which contains some human invention in contradistinction to that which is revealed wholly to the imagination by spiritual vision.

But it should be said that one of the faults of Blake's lack of systematic education, and also of his

intuitive method of work, was a laxity of phrase, and the consequent contradictions which appear from time to time in his writings.

Like *Thel*, the poem of *Tiriel* is in unrhymed verse. The rhythm depends on accent rather than on the number of syllables to the line, which vary from fourteen to eighteen. It is the form of verse he chiefly uses in his prophetic poems, and it must be granted that in his hands it is a very powerful instrument for the expression of his thought, and a decided addition to our poetical forms. With all the force and simplicity of prose, it is yet capable of the metrical sweetness and flow, and more than the charm and variety, of ordinary blank verse. Occasionally there is about it something of the grandeur of the prophetic books of the Old Testament, but too frequently, also, one is conscious of a lapse into the turgid Ossianic of Macpherson. But in *Tiriel* we find less of this than in some of the later works.

The story of *Tiriel* is plain enough, although the meaning of it is not so clear. Tiriel was a sort of King Lear of Titanic mould who had been deposed and driven forth, a blind and helpless old man, by his children. He encounters Har and Heva, his parents, now in their dotage, in charge of their nurse Mnetha. Then he is taken by his terrible brother Ijim and conducted to his palace, where he kills his sons and daughters by his curses, excepting Hela, the youngest, whom he spares in order that she may lead him back to Har and Heva. Finally he dies cursing Har, as the "weak mistaken father of a lawless race." It is diffi-

cult to know what is meant by all this confused and somewhat chaotic allegory, except that Tiriel appears to be a personification of blind tyrannies, based upon selfish cunning and hypocrisy. The other figures—they cannot be called characters—all seem equally to personify different forms of brute violence and selfhood, unenlightened and unstirred by any touch or hint of that spiritual side of things which to Blake was the only reality.

The following quotation will give a fair idea of the style of the poem :

“ He wandered day and night. To him both day and night
were dark :

The sun he felt, but the bright moon was now a useless
globe.

O'er mountains and through vales of woe the blind and
aged man

Wandered, till He that leadeth all led him to the vales of
Har.

“ And Har and Heva, like two children, sat beneath the oak.
Mnetha, now aged, waited on them, and brought them
food and clothing.

But they were as the shadow of Har, and as the years for-
gotten ;

Playing with flowers and running after birds they spent the
day,

And in the night like infants slept, delighted with infant
dreams.

“ Soon the wanderer entered the pleasant gardens of Har.

They ran weeping, like frightened infants, for refuge in
Mnetha's arms.

The blind man felt his way, and cried : ‘ Peace to these
open doors !

Let no one fear, for poor blind Tiriel hurts none but himself.

Tell me, O friends, where am I now, and in what pleasant place ?”

All who have given any careful study to Blake agree in considering *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as incomparably his greatest and most important work. In sheer daring of thought it stands transcendent above and beyond anything of the like nature uttered before or since his time. Although written, with the exception of the introductory “Argument,” in prose, it is the prose of an inspired poet and prophet. Nor does it leave any doubt as to his meaning. The deliverance of a mystic it may be, but a mystic possessed for once with the genius of directness and lucidity. From the first page to the last it strikes one as having been composed at inspirational heat, with, as it were, one effort of the pen ; and in the first few lines only is there any sputtering or incoherence of sense. The “Argument” alone needs elucidation :

“ Once meek, and in a perilous path,
The just man kept his course along
The vales of death.
Roses are planted where thorns grow,
And on the barren heath
Sing the honey bees.

“ Thus the perilous path was planted,
And a river, and a spring
On every cliff and tomb ;
And on the bleached bones
Red clay brought forth.

“ Till the villain left the paths of ease,
To walk in perilous paths, and drive
The just man into barren climes.

“ Now the sneaking serpent walks
In mild humility,
And the just man rages in the wilds
Where lions roam.”

It is useless tarrying to attempt explanation of the meaning here involved when there is so much matter following that admits of no shadow of doubt. As the name of the book implies, the poet's task is to sound the depths of good and evil, and to harmonise them if he can. He states his position on the first page of the text.

“ Without Contraries is no Progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.

“ From these Contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason; Evil is the active springing from Energy.

“ Good is Heaven, Evil is Hell.”

“ THE VOICE OF THE DEVIL.

“ All Bibles or Sacred Codes have been the causes of the following Errors.

“ 1. That man has two real existing principles—*viz.*, a Body and a Soul.

"2. That Energy called Evil is alone from the Body, and that Reason called Good is alone from the Soul.

"3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

"But the following Contraries to these are True.

"1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul, for that called Body is a portion of Soul discerned by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.

"2. Energy is the only Life and is from the Body, and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.

"3. Energy is Eternal Delight.

"Those who restrain desire do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restraint, or reason, usurps its place and governs the unwilling.

"And being restrained it by degrees becomes passive, till it is only the shadow of desire."

I have previously (page 23) quoted Blake's opinion of Swedenborg and his writings as given in this "Prophecy." His view is, in short, that that teacher was but the angel watching by the empty sepulchre, and that "his writings" were "the linen clothes cast off by the risen Christ." In other words, he held him, through timidity or weakness of vision, to have failed in the delivery of his message, and that he himself was come to complete it in all its naked clarity and fulness. "A new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent," he writes. Thirty-

three was Blake's age when *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* was issued. We see, therefore, in what light he regarded himself and his mission. He was the bringer of a new Evangel, which was to complete those that had gone before. In the ensuing pages of the *Marriage* we are permitted to see what the nature of the new Evangel is.

Restraint had heretofore been the rule, and evil had come of it. Now salvation was to arrive by the reverse process. The fulfilment of desire was to take the place of restraint, because restriction meant weakness and disease ; whereas yielding to the energies of the body—which is one with the soul—meant life and “eternal delight.” There might be evil in the gratification of desire, but the evil rectified itself in the longrun. “The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom,” he says in one of those “Proverbs of Hell” which constitute the most brilliant and astonishing part of the *Marriage*. To the same or similar effect are the proverbs: “He who desires but acts not breeds pestilence ;” “Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid courted by incapacity,” and, with still more daring emphasis, “Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires.”

This doctrine of absolute freedom may be said to be the central tenet of his system. It is stated and insisted on in all his books with almost wearisome iteration. His spirit is indulged in it in this one to the full. He seems to be determined to startle and astound by the hurtle and clash of his thought.

aradox jostles on paradox, heresy on heresy, from end

to end. One knows not which to admire the most, or to be the most astonished at—the audacity of his resolve, or the plangent humour in which it is often set forth. The latter quality has not shown itself previously in his writings to any high degree—certainly not to such a degree as to prepare one for the coruscations of Olympian laughter that leap lightning-like from line to line of this audacious “Prophecy.” It is as though he had taken for his motto his own proverb: “No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wing.” His carries him to the very throne of Jehovah, and there shows us what he himself sees. Space will not permit of lengthy quotations; but a few of his words culled here and there will indicate the tenor and tendency of his thought.

“All deities,” he asserts, “reside in the human breast.” “The worship of God,” he says further, “is honouring his gifts in other men, each according to his genius, and loving the greatest men best; those who envy or calumniate great men hate God, for there is no other God.” Strange and hard sayings these; but there are others still more startling. Take the following, for instance:

“The Devil answered: Bray a fool in a mortar with wheat, yet shall his folly not be beaten out of him. If Jesus Christ is the greatest man, you ought to love him in the greatest degree; now hear how he has given his sanction to the ten commandments: did he not mock at the Sabbath, and so mock the Sabbath’s God? Murder those who were murdered, because of him? Turn away the law from the woman taken in

adultery? Steal the labour of others to support him? Bear false witness when he omitted making a defence before Pilate? Covet when he prayed for his disciples, and when he bade them shake off the dust of their feet against such as refused to lodge them? I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments. Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules."

Did ever man before so judge prayer as to regard it as a form of covetousness to put up a petition to the Almighty for things thought needful—for the creature comforts of this world, for health, for prosperity? Judged in this high Puritan spirit, what a sight for gods and godlike men is that of poor mortals prostrating themselves, and in words of praise and adulation, imploring the bestowal of gifts they have not deserved. That Blake did not altogether condemn prayer we know from his advice to one of his young disciples (Mr. George Richmond), who, finding his invention flag during a whole fortnight, went to him for advice. "It is just so with us for weeks together when the visions forsake us, is it not?" he said, turning to his wife. "What do we do then, Kate?" "We kneel down and pray, Mr. Blake," was her reply. But here was a difference: his prayer was for the things of the spirit. Lastly, to make one more excerpt, hear the final pæan—"chorus" he calls it—of the "Song of Liberty" wherewith he closes these strange nuptials of good and evil.

"Let the Priests of the Raven of dawn, no longer in deadly black, with hoarse note curse the sons of

joy ; nor his accepted brethren whom, tyrant, he calls free, lay the bound or build the roof ; nor pale religious lechery call that virginity that wishes but acts not ;

“For everything that lives is holy.”

All this is hard doctrine, and heretical to the last degree ; and yet Blake meant it, and meant it with the sincerity and singleness of soul of a prophet inspired of God. He had no doubt in his own mind of the source and truth of his message, and he delivered it with all the earnestness and force of one who holds himself commissioned by the Most High, and can only neglect to do the task that has been set him at his soul's peril.

Of the illustration and illumination of these poems space will not permit me to say much. They are thoroughly in keeping with the verse, and at once help the melody and the theme ; for in Blake we find a subtle sense of colour and a suggestiveness of form that place him as an illustrator far above all who have worked in the same line and vein. The original copies, as they came from his own hand, have to be seen for the art in them to be fully appreciated ; verbal description gives but a faint idea of its richness and variety. The *Heaven and Hell*, as it is the most daring of his works, so it is the most gorgeous in illustration. Intermingled with and giving, as it were, life to the text, runs a tangle of man and beast and flower, intricate and ceaseless life, whilst

above and beneath, space is rent with thunder and storm or lapt and cloven with flame.

The *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* is one of the shortest of the Prophetic Books; but in its eight pages of harmonious, almost lyrical blank verse it manages to sing Blake's peculiar views in regard to the sexes with a fulness and freedom that leaves little to be desired. On the title page we have the striking figure of a woman held by one foot to the earth, stretching upwards in vain endeavour for release and emancipation. This strikes, as it were, the key-note of the poem, which is further set forth in the two following verses:—

“ I loved Theotormon,
And I was not ashamed ;
I trembled in my virgin fears,
And I hid in Leutha's vale.

“ I plucked Leutha's flower,
And I rose up from the vale ;
But the terrible thunder tore
My virgin mantle in twain.”

Following upon these lines we have the only picture of pure delight that occurs throughout the *Visions*. It represents a woman bending over and kissing a child as it springs from a flower. All the other designs are of unrelieved pain and distress: a woman stretched nude upon a cloud with an eagle tearing at her vitals; a chained female figure bending in flame over the bent and sorrowing form of a man; contorted figures in the anguish of terror or dismay; the

"Daughters of Albion" clasped together on the shores of a dark and gloomy ocean, gazing upwards with imploring looks at an angelic form descending in cloud with outstretched arms and face of terror.

The poem must be regarded as an allegory, and yet it is an allegory of the plainest and most lucid description. Oothoon, the typical woman, "the soft soul of America," has been defiled by Bromion, the evil spirit of humanity, as we must suppose him to be, a half-human Titan, as yet far removed from spiritual light, the creature of ignorance and lust. Theotormon, her lover, in whom is emblemised the man who makes laws with which to torment himself, or creates to himself gods who crucify him in jealous fury and rage, chains them back to back in Bromion's cave, and then seats himself in misery and gloom on the threshold. She who had plucked the flowers of delight in her innocence and youth, now breaks forth in wild lamentations, which, with the replies of her incensed adorer, constitute the chief portion of the poem.

"Oothoon weeps not ; she cannot weep ! her tears are locked up !

But she can howl incessant, writhing her soft, snowy limbs,
And calling Theotormon's eagles to prey upon the flesh !

"I call with holy voice ! Kings of the sounding air !
Rend away this defiled bosom that may reflect
The image of Theotormon on my pure transparent breast !"

"The eagles at her call descend and rend their bleeding prey.
Theotormon severely smiles ; his soul reflects the smile,
As the clear spring muddied with feet of beasts grows pure
and smiles."

The "Daughters of Albion" play but a secondary part in the poem ; indeed, they have less portion in it than the chorus of a Greek drama. They stand more for the ardent hopes that were in Blake's days centred by the friends of freedom in America, than for anything else. American Independence and the French Revolution account for much in the wild strains of Blake's inspiration. We have to thank the former for a great deal of the sweetness and subtle strength of Oothoon's lamentation, which proceeds as follows :—

“ I cry, Arise, O Theotormon ! for the village dog
Barks at the breaking day ; the nightingale has done
lamenting ;
The lark does rustle in the ripe corn, and the eagle returns
From nightly prey, and lifts his golden beak to the pure
east,
Shaking the dust from his immortal pinions, to awake
The sun that sleeps too long ! Arise, my Theotormon ; I
am pure
Because the night is gone that closed me in its deadly black.

“ Silent I hover all the night, and all day could be silent,
If Theotormon would once turn his loved eyes upon me ;
How can I be defiled when I reflect thy image pure ?
Sweetest the fruit that the worm feeds on, and the soul
 prey'd on by woe ;
The new-washed lamb tinged with the village smoke, and
 the bright swan
By the red earth of our immortal river ; I bathe my wings
And I am white and pure to hover round Theotormon's
 breast.

“Then Theotormon broke his silence, and he answered :
 ‘Tell me what is the night or day to one overflowed with
 woe ?

Tell me what is a thought ? and of what substance is it made ?
 Tell me what is joy ? and in what gardens do joys grow ?
 And in what rivers swim the sorrows ? and upon what
 mountains

Wave shadows of discontent ? and in what houses dwell
 the wretched,

Drunken with woe forgotten, and shut up from cold despair ?

“ ‘Tell me where dwell the thoughts forgotten till thou call
 them forth ?

Tell me where dwell the joys of old ? and where the ancient
 loves ?

And when will they renew again and the night of oblivion
 be past ?

That I might traverse times and spaces far remote, and bring
 Comfort into a present sorrow and a night of pain !

Where goest thou, O thought ? to what remote land is thy
 flight ?

If thou returnest to the present moment of affliction,

Wilt thou bring comforts on thy wings, and dews and honey
 and balm,

Or poison from the desert wilds, from the eyes of the
 envier ? ’ ”

Thus proceeds the musical lamentation ; Bromion, the
 slave of passion, next taking up the strain, and being
 answered after a day and a night by Oothoon.

“ O Urizen, Creator of men ! mistaken Demon of heaven !

Thy joys are tears, thy labour vain, to form man to thine
 image.

How can one joy absorb another ? Are not different joys
 Holy, eternal, infinite ? and each joy is a love.

.

“ Does the whale worship at thy footsteps as the hungry dog ?
 Or does he scent the mountain prey, because his nostrils
 wide

Draw in the ocean? does his eye discern the flying cloud
As the raven's eye? or does he measure the expanse like
the vulture?

“ Does the still spider view the cliffs where eagles hide their
young?

Or does the fly rejoice because the harvest is brought in?
Does not the eagle scorn the earth and despise the treasures
beneath?

But the mole knoweth what is there, and the worm shall
tell it thee!”

So subtle is the blended harmony of music and
thought that one is tempted to go on quoting; but
the above must be sufficient, though the seductive
strain continues to the end, where we have a repetition
of the words that close *The Marriage of Heaven and
Hell*:

“ Arise, you little glancing wings, and sing your infant joy!
Arise and drink your bliss! *For everything that lives is holy!*”

This is the prophet's justification for the advocacy
of unrestrained indulgence of natural desires which is
the sole and most lucidly stated motive of the poem.
Many would doubtless condemn Blake for what they
would consider its immoral tendency; but no one
reading the poem with a pure mind can find it impure
or immoral. It is simply a prophecy of what may be
—of what, as he thought, will be, when humanity has
grown out of its present tyrannical subjection to evil
law and custom, the invention of a God (*Theo*) who
torments (*tormon*). This “Prophecy” was, like the

others, written to help forward the time when better thoughts and better customs shall prevail. It is prophetic, not in the commonly accepted sense, but rather in the sense that what is the prevailing thought in the minds of the young men and maidens of this generation will be realised in the laws and customs of the next. What they dream to-day their descendants in the to-morrow of the ages will live.

In the same year as the *Daughters of Albion* appeared the *Prophecy of America*, a book consisting of sixteen pages of the strangest intermingling of wild fantastic design and verse of the most dithyrambic description that was ever conceived and brought to light. The designs represent human beings in all sorts of attitudes, possible and impossible, and in all sorts of moods, from that of joy to wildest despair. They are wrapped in cloud and flame, buried deep in the sea, where sharks devour them, or cast upon bare rocks, where eagles tear out their vitals; pursued by horrible monsters; left desolate on storm-blown heights to complain, or it may be to prophesy. One page shows a design of rare pastoral beauty, representing a child reposing on the fleecy back of a sheep, while a gracefully drawn nude figure lies on the grass beside it, the group being overshadowed by the drooping branches of a tree, on which beautiful birds are perching. One design which is seen here occurs also in the *Gates of Paradise*, and again in Blair's *Grave*. It depicts an old man entering Death's door. There is also another which recurs in the *Job*. Whether the designs fit the text or not—and for the most part

they do not—there can be no question as to their adding to, and, as it were, filling it out.

Something has already been said about the literary character and quality of Blake's art, and in none of his books is this more strikingly exemplified than in the *America*. His aim is to appeal strongly to the imagination, and this he does most powerfully by his dual-gifted pen. We may find fault with his drawing, and he leaves room enough for us to do so, but even the touch of monstrosity about his figures have the effect of producing a weird note, purposely meant. The general effect must have been greatly heightened in the coloured copies, which occur occasionally, though not often. In this instance, one can wax more enraptured over the decoration than over the poem itself, which is for the most part wildly incoherent to the mere outward sense, but doubtless with deep mystic meanings.

The prelude is the finest part of the poem. It deals with two of those shadowy elemental forms out of which Blake framed his noblest myths. Orc, the spirit of Rebellion, imprisoned by Urthona, is secretly fed and sustained by the "nameless" daughter of that ancient demon or god, until the fulness of time. With their union this shadowy spirit of the Western continent becomes vocal :

"For never from her iron tongue could voice or sound arise ;
But dumb from that dread day when Orc assay'd his fierce
embrace."

On feeling that embrace "she cast aside her clouds

and smiled her first-born smile, as when a black cloud shows its lightnings to the silent deep." This is very fine as symbolising the opening of the new world to the old. Liberty, the birth of which is the result of this union, is thus nobly apostrophised:

"Soon as she saw the terrible boy then burst the virgin's cry:

'I love thee; I have found thee, and will not let thee go.

Thou art the image of God who dwells in darkness of Africa,

And thou art fallen to give me life in regions of dark death.'"

A wild hurtle of revolution and battle ensues, in which the shadowy forms of Orc, Urizen, Urthona, Enitharmon, etc., oddly mingle with the relatively pigmy forms of matter-of-fact personages who figured in the American rebellion—

"Washington, Franklin, Paine, Warren, Gates, Hancock, and Green."

The poem may be best described as a revolutionary song, prophetic of liberty. Notwithstanding its shadowy and Ossian-like forms and its frequently incoherent rush of words, there is a sort of ecstatic strain of inspiration running through it from end to end, of which the following may be taken as a specimen, and as, in a measure, a prophetic one too.

“ The morning comes, the night decays, the watchmen leave
their stations ;
The grave is burst, the spices shed, the linen wrapped up.
The bones of death, the covering clay, the sinews shrunk
and dried,
Reviving shake, inspiring move, breathing ! awakening !
Spring, like redeemed captives when their bonds and bars
are burst.
Let the slave grinding at the mill run out into the field ;
Let him look up unto the heavens and laugh in the bright
air.
Let the unchained soul, shut up in darkness and in sighing,
Whose face has never seen a smile in thirty weary years,
Rise and look out ; his chains are loose, his dungeon doors
are open.
And let his wife and children return from the oppressor’s
scourge ;
They look behind at every step and believe it is a dream.”

It may be worth while to linger here a moment to consider Blake’s allegorical creations. It is impossible always to gather or define what he means by them ; and yet dimly and in a distant sort of way one obtains a hint of the significance lying beneath the most mystically involved. But here and there we may perceive his method of creating his shadowy dæmon or god, and building up his myth. I have given a hint of the meaning of the Titanic Theotormon, symbolical of the spirit of man subject to evil law and custom. In the name “Bromion” there is a suggestion of the “brumal” darkness in which the spirit of man grovelled before the dissemination of spiritual light. “Oothoon” is less explicit ; it is evidently onomatopoeic, suggestive of the soft winds of spring with their

savours of all sweet things, quickening and awakening desire and stirring the pulses of the blood in harmony with the moving sap of all vegetable growths. But the syllable "thoon" has not unlikely been derived from the same source as "thona" in the name "Urthona," which appears to be composed of the two German particles "ur" and "thon;" the first having the meaning of original or primordial, as in "Urquell," original source, "Ursprache," primitive language; the second signifying "clay." Thus "Urthona" by this derivation may mean one of the original earth demons or Titans. His "nameless" daughter is the spirit of the Western continent.

The particle "ur" appears again in the name of "Urizen," the tyrant god, first-born of time, who looms up so large and monstrous in most of the prophecies. The second syllable "izen" is in like manner so curiously suggestive of "Eisen" (iron), that one cannot but think that it was taken with "ur" to form the name of the great original elemental being or god whose vitals and whose rule were alike of iron.

Los, the spirit of Time, it has been suggested, is simply *Sol*, the sun, the time-measurer, written backwards. So Orc, the spirit of Rebellion and of Liberty, may be formed in the same way from *Cor*, the heart, from the heart coming all true rebellions. Enitharmon, space, and the universal and typical woman, may have been formed from "zenith" and "harmony." From "Zenitharmony" it requires but a slight docking at either end to yield the poetically-flowing name fitting for the bride of Time and the mother of all.

V.

REFERENCE has already been made to the remarkable figure, "The Ancient of Days," forming the frontispiece to the next prophecy, *Europe*. It was a favourite composition with Blake; and, according to Smith, when colouring it by hand, he "always bestowed more time and enjoyed greater pleasure in the task than from anything else he produced." All the designs to this work are on the same scale of grandeur as the first. Most of them cover either the whole or the greater portion of the page. There is no dallying with delight or straying by peaceful ways as in the *America*. On the only two pages whereon an attempt is made at decoration pure and simple, the designs are of spiders, with their webs and victims, or mingled serpents and caterpillars. There is a jostling throughout of the grotesque and the horrible, the wild and portentous. Below and between the lines of the title we have the coils of a huge serpent; dividing the pages with the prelude are two illustrations, one representing a naked man at the mouth of a cavern lying in wait to murder a traveller, the other showing three strangely contorted figures descending into the abyss, while a fourth springs upwards on to a cloud. On another page there is a horrent figure of War, crowned and in mail, turning away from winged angels pleading for peace;

and another, a pope-like being with bats' wings, seated upon a cloud with a book upon his knee, while below him two winged àngels are fixing a star; a third shows us a giant chained in a dungeon and War disappearing through a door. On the last page a man is saving a woman and child from a deluge of flame.

Gilchrist has a striking remark upon this poem. He says: "Though the natural impulse is to close such a book in despair, we can testify to the reader that were it his lot, as it has been ours, to read and re-read many times this and other of the 'Prophetic' volumes, he would do so with a deepening conviction that their incoherence has a grandeur about it, as that of a man whose eyes are fixed on strange and awful sights, invisible to bystanders. . . . It is as if the 'visions were angry,' and hurried in stormy disorder before his rapt gaze, no longer to bless and teach, but to bewilder and confound." In short, the more one reads the deeper becomes one's conviction that through all this wild confusion and strife of elemental gods and demons there runs a purpose and meaning which, though hidden to us, were clear enough to the poet. But who shall unravel it all? Who shall rise to the altitude at which he stood and describe what he saw?

The poem proper begins with the following harmonious verse:—

" The deep of winter came,
What time the secret child
Descended through the great gates of the eternal day;
War ceased, and all the troops like shadows fled to their
abodes.

“ Then Enitharmon saw her sons and daughters rise around ;
Like pearly clouds they meet together in the crystal house ;
And Los, possessor of the moon, joy'd in the peaceful night,
Thus speaking while his numerous sons shook their bright,
fiery wings.

“ Again the night is come
That strong Urthona takes his rest,
And Urizen, unloos'd from chains,
Glows like a meteor in the distant north ;
Stretch forth your hands and strike the elemental strings—
Awake the thunders of the deep.”

Enitharmon, whose “ night of joy ” now comes, desires that “ woman may have dominion ” for a time upon the earth. She bids Rintrah, “ eldest born, second to none but one,” and Palamabron, the “ horned priest,” “ Go ! tell the human race that woman's love is sin.” This is a return to Blake's oft reiterated doctrine ; all joy is to be forbidden on pain of living an eternal life that “ awaits the worms of sixty winters in an allegorical abode where existence hath never come.” Then—

“ Enitharmon slept
Eighteen hundred years : Man was a Dream !
The night of Nature and their harps unstrung,
She slept in middle of the nightly song—
Eighteen hundred years a female dream.”

During this sleep of Enitharmon, by which is symbolised the perversion of mankind from the true and holy ways of nature, all kinds of evils and horrors accumulate and fall upon Albion, causing Enitharmon

to laugh in her sleep. When the cup of horrors is at last full, Enitharmon woke and "called her sons and daughters to the sports of night." The wild revelry of her children continues, "waking the stars of Urizen with their immortal songs, till morning oped the eastern gate." Then everyone fled, and Enitharmon wept because the day of her—and woman's—dominion was past.

"But terrible Orc, when he beheld the morning in the east,
Shot from the heights of Enitharmon.
And in the vineyards of red France appear'd the light of his
fury.

Then Los arose ; his head he rear'd, in snaky thunders clad,
And with a cry that shook all nature to the utmost pole,
Call'd all his sons to the strife of blood."

So ends the prophecy. One of the finest and most profound passages in the poem, full of richest meaning when carefully thought out, is the following :

"Placed in the order of the stars, when the five senses whelmed
In deluge o'er the earth-born man ; then bound the flexile
eyes

Into two stationary orbs, concentrating all things.
The ever-varying spiral ascent to the heaven of heavens
Were bended downward, and the nostril's golden gates shut,
Turned outward, barred and petrified against the infinite.
Thought changed the infinite to a serpent ; that which
pitieth

To a devouring flame ; and man fled from its face and hid
In forests of night ; then all the eternal forests were divided
Into earths rolling in circles of space, that like an ocean
rushed

And overwhelmed all except this finite wall of flesh."

To this Mr. Swinburne has the comment :—"Thus again recurs the doctrine that the one inlet left us for spiritual perception—that, namely, of the senses—is but one and the least of many inlets and channels of communication now destroyed or perverted by the creative demon." Which recalls to mind the remark of Blake to John Linnell, previously quoted, to the effect that all men could see the visions as he saw them were it not for yielding to lust, selfishness, and all unrighteousness.

To *Urizen*, *Ahania*, the *Book of Los*, the most amorphous and inchoate of the Prophetic Books written up to this time, space will permit of but the briefest reference. *Ahania* is generally supposed to have been intended as a continuation of *Urizen*. The two might fittingly be called Blake's *Book of Genesis*, having to do entirely with the creation of the universe and man, and the demons or gods and other created things that inhabit or exist in it. In the opening chapters of *Urizen* his spirit broods creative over nothingness, formless and void, and out of it first comes the vast, terrific form of *Urizen*, the *Urgott*, the primitive deity. Then from him was divided *Los* or *Time*.

"Los wept bowling around the dark demon,
And cursing his lot, for in anguish
Urizen was rent from his side."

Los howls "in a dismal stupor, groaning, gnashing, groaning," till the wrenching apart was healed. The

succeeding description of the formation of the body of Urizen, Los "beating his fetters of iron," heating his furnaces, and pouring "iron odor, and odor of brass," till successively skull, spine, brain, heart, and the organs of the senses were formed, is one of the most astonishing things in the whole of these prophetic scriptures. Next is described the creation of the woman by separation from Los, and—

" All eternity shuddered at sight
Of the first female, now separate,
Pale as a cloud of snow,
Waving before the face of Los.

" Wonder, awe, fear, astonishment,
Petrify the eternal myriads
At the first female form now separate :
They called her Pity, and fled."

The woman thus created is Enitharmon or Space, and Los or Time becomes her husband and the father of Orc. Then Enitharmon bears other sons and daughters—"an enormous race." Urizen sickens at the sight of "his eternal creations," "sons and daughters of sorrow on mountains weeping, wailing,"—first Thiriël, then Utha, then Grodna and Fuzon. Thiriël (probably from "Ithuriel") is born from a cloud; Utha, "from the waters emerging," seems to have derived his name from the word "thaw" (changing "w" to "u"); Fuzon, from "fuze," "flamed out, first begotten, last born"; while Grodna¹ is born of

¹ *Grodna*, Russian "earth."

the earth. Then his daughters were born "from herbs and cattle, from monsters and worms of the pit." Meanwhile Urizen—

" In darkness closed, viewed all his race,
And his soul sickened ; he cursed
Both sons and daughters ; for he saw
That no flesh nor spirit could keep
His iron laws one moment."

The remainder of the poem tells how the children of Urizen built cities, lived amid terror and torment and infection, "bound down to the earth by their narrowing perceptions."

" They lived a period of years,
Then left a noisome body
To the jaws of devouring darkness.
And their children wept, and built
Tombs in the desolate places,
And formed laws of prudence ; and called them
The eternal laws of God."

Enormous, and even chaotic, as are the forces at work in this prose poem, there is an evident meaning running through it, although much remains dark and enigmatic. Nor could it be otherwise when such gigantic allegories and myths are dealt with as must be fashioned when treating of the primary elemental forces and abstractions like those of Time and Space. Here and there one seems to obtain glimpses of a deep satiric meaning too ; albeit, in the main, the action

moves with a gloom and solemnity that is almost appalling, and the more so when text and illustrations are taken together.

Pen can hardly describe the accumulated horrors of misshapen and misbegotten humanity, or demons in the shape of humanity, that crowd the pages. They are more like nightmares than anything conceived and drawn in a waking state. Only one of the many designs that seem to overload the poem is touched with any graciousness of human beauty or hint of human tenderness, and that is one in which the first woman stands, fair and beautiful, by the side of Los, and is embraced by their son, Orc, if we except the ill-drawn female and the spirit-like infant dividing the second page with the prelude.

Ahania is weak and shapeless in comparison with the enormous rush and turmoil of *Urizen*. Nor is it possible to extract much sense out of it. The first part describes what Blake would have called the separation of *Urizen's* emanation from himself, and the creation of *Ahania*, his goddess queen.

“ She fell down a faint shadow, wandering
In chaos and circling dark *Urizen*,
As the moon, anguish'd, circles the earth,
Hopeless, abhorred, a death-shadow,
Unseen, unbodied, unknown,
The mother of pestilence.”

Then we have a description of the fashioning of a bow by *Urizen*, with which to slay his son *Fuzon*, whose corpse is nailed to a tree.

“ The corse of his first begotten
On the accursed Tree of Mystery,
On the topmost stem of the Tree,
Urizen nailed Fuzon’s corse.”

The remainder of the poem is almost wholly taken up with the lament of Ahania for Urizen.

“ And the voice cried : ‘ O Urizen ! Love !
Flower of morning ! I weep on the verge
Of Non-entity : how wide the abyss
Between Ahania and thee !

“ ‘ I lie on the verge of the deep,
I see thy dark clouds ascend ;
I see thy black forests and floods,
A horrible waste to my eyes.

“ ‘ Where is my golden palace ?
Where is my ivory bed ?
Where the joys of my morning hour ?
Where the sons of eternity singing

“ ‘ To awake bright Urizen my king,
To arise to the mountain sport,
To the bliss of eternal valleys ;

“ ‘ To awake my king in the morn,
To embrace Ahania’s joy
On the breath of his open bosom ;
From my soft cloud of dew to fall
In showers of life on his harvests.’ ”

We see traces of the influence of the Hebrew Scripture in many parts of Blake’s poems ; but nowhere, perhaps, do we find the inspiration of a particular book so manifest as that of the *Song of Solomon* upon *Ahania*.

This poem is as scantily illustrated as *Urizen* is overloaded, and in none of the three designs, which constitute the whole, is the artist at his best. For limp, misshapen, and dislocated womanhood, the female on the title page—Ahania “on the verge of Non-entity”—would take the prize even amongst Blake’s doubtful anatomy.¹ There is some grotesque force, however, in the design of dead Fuzon half-buried under rocks. The *Song of Los* is more richly endowed with illustration.

This poem may be said to stand almost by itself, no hint or trace of connection between it and any other of the Prophecies being visible, beyond the fact that it deals with some of the same huge, shadowy forms that appear in the other books, such as *Urizen*, *Orc*, *Oothoon*, *Theotormon*, *Har*, and *Heva*; but others are likewise introduced, some of them never to reappear. It treats in the poet’s usual mystical allegorical manner of the perversions and delusions of time. There is no doubt as to his general meaning, albeit expressed vaguely and sometimes with vast incoherence. It is as though the prophecy had been delivered through an inspiration—intoxicated sibyl, or medium, and the scribe was only able to catch a few words or a line or two here and there, leaving vast gaps of sense.

¹ The illustrations in Messrs. Ellis and Yeats’ work must not be taken as always representing Blake. Sometimes they are reproductions from his originals; in other cases, and in particular in *Urizen* and *Ahania*, they are not merely feeble but grotesque imitations of Blake, apparently by a child, or one who did not know how to draw.

The poem is concerned with the successive growth and influence of the different religions and philosophies of the world, or, one should rather say, with their successive deliverance to mankind, for, according to Blake, these things are the work of gods or demons, and not the result of gradual development. But perhaps, as the poem is short, it will be best to give it entire, as a specimen of the poetic work of what we may call the middle period of the poet's activity.

THE SONG OF LOS.

AFRICA.

I WILL sing you a song of Los, the Eternal Prophet :
He sang it to four harps at the tables of Eternity,
In heart-formed Africa.
Urizen faded ! Ariston shuddered !
And thus the song began :

Adam stood in the Garden of Eden,
And Noah on the mountains of Ararat :
They saw Urizen give his Laws to the Nations
By the hands of the children of Los.

Adam shuddered ! Noah faded ! black grew the sunny
African
When Rintrah gave Abstract Philosophy to Brama in the
East.

(Night spoke to the cloud,
Lo these human formed spirits, in smiling hypocrisy war
Against one another, so let them war on, slaves to the
Eternal Elements.)

Noah shrunk beneath the waters ;
Abraham fled in fires from Chaldea ;
Moses beheld upon Mount Sinai forms of dark delusion ;
To Trismagistus, Palamabron gave an abstract Law,
To Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato.

Time rolled on o'er all the sons of Har, time after time.
Orc on Mount Atlas, chained down with the chain of
jealousy.

Then Oothoon hovered over Judah and Jerusalem,
And Jesus heard his voice (a man of sorrows), he received
A Gospel from wretched Theotormon.

The human race began to wither for the healthy built
Secluded places, fearing the joys of Love,
And the diseased only propagated ;
So Antamon called up Leutha from his valley of delight,
And to Mahomet a loose Bible gave.
But in the North, to Odin, Sotha gave a Code of War,
Because of Diralada thinking to reclaim a joy.

These were the Churches, Hospitals, Castles, Palaces,
Like nets, and gins, and traps to catch the joys of Eternity,
And all the rest a desert,
Till like a dream Eternity was obliterated and erased.
Since that dread day when Har and Heva fled,
Because their brethren and sisters lived in War and Lust ;
And as they fled, they shrunk
Into two narrow, doleful forms,
Creeping in reptile flesh upon
The bosom of the ground ;
And all the rest of Nature shrunk
Before their shrunken eyes.

Thus the terrible race of Los and Enitharmon gave
Laws and Religions to the sons of Har, binding them more
And more to earth, closing and restraining ;
Till a philosophy of the five senses was complete.
Urizen wept and gave it into the hands of Newton and Locke.

Clouds roll heavy upon the Alps round Rousseau and
Voltaire,
And on the mountains of Lebanon round the deceased Gods
Of Asia, and on the deserts of Africa round the Fallen
Angels.
The Guardian Prince of Albion burns in his nightly tent.

ASIA.

The Kings of Asia heard
The howl rise up from Europe ;
And each ran out from his Web,
From his ancient woven Den ;
For the darkness of Asia was startled
At the thick-flaming, thought-creating fires of Orc.
And the Kings of Asia stood
And cried in bitterness of soul :
Shall not the King call for Famine from the heath,
Nor the Priest for Pestilence from the fen
To restrain, to destroy, to thin
The inhabitants of mountain and plain,
In the day of full-feeding prosperity,
And the night of delicious songs ?
Shall not the Counsellor throw his curb
Of Poverty on the laborious,
To fix the price of labour,
To invent allegoric riches ?
And the privy-admonishers of men
Call for Fires in the City,
For heaps of smoking ruins
In the night of prosperity and wantonness
To turn man from his path,
To restrain the child from the womb,
To cut off the bread from the city,
That the remnant may learn to obey ;
That the pride of the heart may fail ;
That the lust of the eyes may be quenched ;

That the delicate ear in its infancy
May be dulled, and the nostrils closed up,
To teach mortal worms the path
That leads from the gates of the Grave

Urizen heard their cry,
And his shuddering, waving wings
Went enormous above the red flames,
Drawing clouds of despair through the heavens
Of Europe as he went ;
And his Books of brass, iron, and gold
Melted over the land as he flew,
Heavy-waving, howling, weeping.

And he stood over Judea,
And stayed in his ancient place,
And stretched his clouds over Jerusalem.

For Adam, a mouldering skeleton,
Lay bleached on the Garden of Eden,
And Noah, as white as snow,
On the mountains of Ararat.

Then the thunders of Urizen bellowed aloud
From his woven darkness above.
Orc, raging in European darkness,
Arose like a pillar of fire above the Alps,
Like a serpent of fiery flame !
The sullen Earth
Shrunk !

Forth from the dead dust, rattling, bones to bones
Join ; shaking, convulsed, the shivering clay breathes ;
And all flesh naked stands ; Fathers and Friends ;
Mothers and Infants ; Kings and Warriors.

The Grave shrieks with delight, and shakes
Her hollow womb, and clasps the solid stem ;
Her bosom swells with wild desire ;

And milk, and blood, and glandous wine
In rivers rush and shout and dance
On mountain, dale, and plain.
The Song of Los is ended ;
Urizen wept.

The two remaining Prophetic Books, which we shall examine, are separated from what we may term the Cycle of the Four Continents by a broad space of years. During that time Blake's ideas developed, or else, to use his own form of speech, the visions became more angry, and made greater demands upon him. It may be that the change of air, and scene—the one quickening the blood in his veins, the other kindling to renewed vigour the fiery vehemence of his brain—gave a fresh impetus to his creative and prophetic powers, and was thus largely instrumental in the production of the *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, which, in their way, form as marvellous a piece of writing as is to be met with in our literature. I do not know that we have any precise information as to which of these books was first in point of time. Both were issued in 1804. But from internal evidence, I should judge that *Milton* was the earlier of the two, and that it was completed before the author left Felpham. The *Jerusalem*, we know, was finished, or, at least, had additions made to it after his return to London, for in page 38 we read :

“In Felpham I heard and saw the visions of Albion ;
I write in South Molton Street, what I best see and hear
In regions of humanity, in London's opening streets.”

There is another reason for thinking that the *Milton* was composed first, namely, that it is the less obscure of the two. This is perhaps not saying a great deal when there is so much that is dark and enigmatic in both ; but taking them bulk for bulk, one finds more in the *Milton* that rewards the unaided intellect than in the *Jerusalem*. There are not wanting indications, that the poet was inspired to this effort by a renewed perusal of *Paradise Lost*. In the following lines, for instance, we find several Miltonic echoes :

“Say first, what moved Milton, who walked about in Eternity
One hundred years, pondering the intricate mazes of
Providence ?

Unhappy tho’ in heaven, he obeyed, he murmured not, he
was silent,

Viewing his six-fold Emanation scattered through the deep
In torment. To go into the deep her to redeem and him-
self to perish ?

What cause at length moved Milton to this unexampled
deed ?

A Bard’s prophetic song : for sitting at eternal tables,
Terrific among the Sons of Albion in chorus solemn and
loud,

A Bard broke forth ; all sat attentive to the awful man.”

But we ought not to pass amid the shadows and mist of the poem with its Titanic forms and thunderous reverberations, without first giving something more than a glance at the preface, which is worth quoting in full.

“The stolen and perverted writings of Homer and Ovid, of Plato and Cicero, which all men ought to condemn, are set up by artifice against the sublime of the

Bible; but when the New Age is at leisure to pronounce, all will be set right, and those grand works of the more ancient and consciously and professedly inspired men will hold their proper rank; and the daughters of memory shall become the daughters of inspiration. Shakespeare and Milton were both curbed by the general malady and infection from the silly Greek and Latin slaves of the sword. Rouse up, O young men of the New Age! Set your foreheads against the ignorant hirelings! For we have hirelings in the camp, the court, and the university; who would, if they could, for ever prolong corporeal war. Painters! on you I call! Sculptors! Architects! suffer not the fashionable fools to depress some powers by the prices they pretend to give for contemptible works, or the expensive advertising boasts that they make of such works: believe Christ and His Apostles, that there is a class of men whose whole delight is in destroying. We do not want either Greek or Roman models if we are but just and true to our own imaginations, those words of eternity in which we shall live for ever, in Jesus our Lord."

" And did those feet in ancient time
Walk over England's mountains green,
And was the holy hand of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?

" And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic mills?

“ Bring me my bow of burning gold ;
Bring me my arrows of desire ;
Bring me my spear : O clouds, unfold
Bring me my chariot of fire.

“ I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.”

This striking prelude is closed with the words from Numbers (xi. 29) : “ Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets,” from which we may gather something of the sense in which Blake uses the word “prophet.” At first sight it would seem as though not much meaning were to be got out of the poet's appeal from the “artifice” of the old classical writers to the pure and fresher spirit of the New Age. But there is both sense and truth in what he says, though, like all that the poet advances, it is touched with the vagueness, if not with the delirium, of the oracular or prophetic utterance.

After this strange preface, the poem opens with characteristic Blakeian splendour of diction and quaintness of mysticism :—

“ Daughters of Beulah ! Muses who inspire the Poet's Song !
Record the journey of immortal Milton thro' your realms
Of terror and mild moony lustre, in soft sexual delusions
Of varied beauty, to delight the wanderer, and repose
His burning thirst and freezing hunger ! ”

Of the poem itself let it suffice to say that it pur-

ports to tell of the incarnation and descent into hell of Milton, his task being that of redemption through inspiration, which cannot be effected in less than six thousand years. But to state this is to give but the scantiest possible description of the Prophecy, in which, what with his wondrous cosmogony, his gigantic myths, and his theology, we soon find ourselves traveling through regions of inchoate darkness and dim moony mist, amid giant shadows and forms for ever fluid and changing; perplexed, too, by—even though often admiring—his heterodox views and striking imaginations. We find here thoughts and ideas repeated that are never far to seek in Blake's works; but we also encounter new ones, or the re-instatement of old ones in more startling guise. After the "Song of the Bard," in which we have the magnificent but almost formless myth of Palamabron's harrow and horses, Milton states his purpose in these words:—

“I go to Eternal Death! The nations still
Follow after the detestable Gods of Priam; in pomp
Of warlike selfhood, contradicting and blaspheming.
When will the Resurrection come, to deliver the sleeping
body

From contemptibility? O when, Lord Jesus, wilt Thou
come?

Tarry no longer, for my soul lies at the gates of death.
I will arise and look forth for the morning of the grave;
I will go down to the sepulchre and see if morning breaks;
I will go down to self-annihilation and eternal death,
Lest the Last Judgment come and find me unannihilate,
And I be seized and given into the hands of my own Self-
hood.

The Lamb of God is seen through mists and shadows, hovering
Over the sepulchres in clouds of Jehovah and winds of Elo-
him,

A disk of blood distant ; and heavens and earths roll dark be-
tween.

What do I here before the Judgment without my Emana-
tion ?

With the daughters of memory, and not with the daughters of
inspiration ?

I in my Selfhood am that Satan ; I am that Evil One !

He is my Spectre ! in my obedience to loose him from my
Hells,

To claim the Hells, my Furnaces, I go to Eternal Death."

The poet then describes how, "on the verge of Beu-
lah, he saw his own shadow," and "entered into it." The accompanying illustration, depicting Milton entering his shadow, is one of the grandest to be found in the whole of these Prophetic Books. Space will not permit us to follow the shadow as it "kept its course among the spectres in a trail of light as of a comet," till it came to the "Mundane Shell," in the account of which we have a piece of Blake's strange cosmogony ; nor to describe the enormous strife between Milton and Urizen, the one typifying inspiration, the other reason, which, as we have seen, always stands for error and wrong in Blake's mystical philosophy. As little can we tarry to take note of the temptation by the sons and daughters of Rahab and Tirzah, when "The Two-fold form Hermaphroditic, and the Double-sexed,—

The Female-male, and the Male-female, self-dividing stood
Before him in their beauty, and in the cruelties of holiness,
Shining in darkness, glorious upon the deeps of Entuthon."

Very beautiful is the self-sacrifice of Ololon for Milton, as again setting forth one of Blake's greatest and most characteristic thoughts, the necessity of eternal self-sacrifice, by way of redemption from eternal selfishness.

“ And Ololon said, ‘ Let us descend also, and let us give Ourselves to death in Ulro among the Transgressors.’ ”

But the myth—for it is more myth than allegory—is so involved and obscure that it were vain to attempt explanation here ; nor will there be found many with patience enough to toil through the remainder of the poem, brilliant and scintillating with gems though much of it is. It is interesting to know, albeit we do not obtain much by the knowledge, that “ Bowlahoola is named Law by mortals,” that “ Golgonooza is named Art and Manufactures ” (though elsewhere Golgonooza is London), and that “ in Bowlahoola Los's Anvils stand and his Furnaces rage.”

“ Thundering the Hammers beat and the Bellows blow loud.

.
The Bellows are the Animal Lungs, the Hammers the Anvil
Heart,

The Furnaces the Stomach for digestion.”

It would help us, too, in our attempts to understand Blake's gigantic mythology or demonology if he gave us an insight into the meaning of his vast and too often enigmatic forms, as here into those of Los and Enitharmon,

“ Los is by mortals named Time ; Enitharmon is named
Space ;
But they depict him bald and aged who is in eternal youth
All-powerful, and his locks flourish like the brows of
morning ;
He is the Spirit of Prophecy, the ever-apparent Elias.
Time is the mercy of Eternity ; without Time’s swiftness,
Which is the swiftness of all things, all were eternal tor-
ment.”

The rest of the first book is mainly taken up with a description of Nature, the like of which was never before conceived by mortal man, in which is included a vision of the gathering of the harvest of Time and of the treading of the winepress of War, when all are put “ into the press, the oppressor and the oppressed.” Not much is there in the whole of Blake’s writings wherein such splendour of thought and thorough earnestness of conviction cause each line, as it were, to palpitate with vital energy like those that follow.

“ How red the sons and daughters of Luvah ! Here they
tread the grapes,
Laughing and shouting, drunk with odours ; many fall
o’erwearied ;
Drowned in the wine is many a youth and maiden ; those
around
Lay them on skins of Tigers and of the spotted Leopard
and the Wild Ass
Till they revive, or bury them in cool grots, making lamen-
tation.
This Winepress is called War on Earth ; it is the Printing-
Press

Of Los : there he lays his words in order above the mortal
brain,
As cogs are formed in a wheel to turn the cogs of the ad-
verse wheel."

Every living thing takes part in the vintage, "the
earwig armed, the tender maggot—emblem of immor-
tality—the flea, louse, bug, the tapeworm, all the ar-
mies of disease, visible or invisible." These and all
living things else "throw off their gorgeous raiment,"
and "rejoice with loud jubilee around the winepresses
of Luvah, naked and drunk with wine." But it is
different with man :

" . . . in the Winepresses, the Human grapes sing not nor
dance ;

They howl and writhe in shoals of torment, in fierce flames
consuming,

In chains of iron and in dungeons circled with ceaseless
fires,

In pits and dens and shades of death, in shapes of torment
and woe.

• • • • • •
" They dance around the dying, and they drink the howl and
groan ;

They catch the shrieks in cups of gold ; they hand them to
one another ;

These are the sports of love, and these the sweet delights of
amorous play,

Tears of the grape, the death-sweat of the cluster, the last
sigh

Of the mild youth who listens to the luring songs of
Luvah."

One might go on quoting gem after gem ; but only

one more selection shall be given here, and that from the second book, which, taken as a whole, is much more obscure and difficult of comprehension than the first. The following, however, considering the poet's symbolical style, is plain enough, and needs little by way of gloss or explanation.

“ In the Eastern porch of Satan's Universe Milton stood and said :

‘Satan, my Spectre ! I know my power thee to annihilate
And be a greater in thy place, and be thy Tabernacle,
A covering for thee to do thy will, till one greater comes
And smites me as I smote thee, and becomes my covering.
Such are the Laws of thy false Heavens ; but Laws of
Eternity

Are not such. Know thou that I come to Self-Annihilation :

Such are the Laws of Eternity, that each shall mutually
Annihilate himself for others' good, as I for thee.

Thy purpose, and the purposes of the Priests and of thy
Churches,

Is to impress on men the fear of death, to teach

Trembling and fear, terrors, constriction, abject selfishness ;

Mine is to teach men to despise death and to go on

In fearless majesty annihilating Self, laughing to scorn

Thy Laws and terrors, shaking down thy Synagogues as
webs.

I come to discover before Heaven and Hell self-righteousness

In all its hypocritic turpitude, opening to every eye

These wonders of Satan's holiness, shewing to the earth

The Idol Virtues of the Natural Heart, and Satan's Seat

Explore in all its Selfish Natural Virtue, and put off

In Self-annihilation all that is not of God alone :

To put off Self and all I have ever and ever. Amèn.”

One needs not to insist upon the splendour and noble quality of the thought here presented ; it is evident to all, notwithstanding Blake's peculiar method of expressing himself. He seems to hold in especial disdain the particularly Christian virtue of thinking for ever of self and of the safety of self, setting the consideration of personal salvation above everything else, in it forgetting or neglecting the higher duty of thinking of and doing for others. This to him is "self-righteousness in all its hypocritic turpitude," and constitutes "Satan's Seat," which can only be conquered by the mutual annihilation of self for others' good. The thought is essentially heretical, but therein lies Blake's peculiar characteristic and strength, that he cannot hypocritically pretend to believe in a thing that is alien to his thought.

One would like, before finally finishing with the *Milton*, to quote the almost unapproachable lines, commencing—

"Thou hearest the nightingale begin the song of spring ;
The lark, sitting upon his earthly bed, just as the morn
Appears, listens silent ; then, springing from the waving
cornfield, loud
He leads the choir of day ;"

but the temptation must be resisted, else we might be led on to quote gem after gem from these incomparable compositions that, like the world, are full of dark and inscrutable things, though illumined here and there with beauties that redeem and, as it were, sanctify the whole.

VI.

OF the *Jerusalem*, the last completed of the Prophetic Books, little can be said here. Although much the longest, and in the mystic's own opinion the greatest, of his works—indeed, “the grandest that the world contains”—it is by far the darkest and most difficult to unravel. Sooth to say, there are whole pages that afford no hint or glimmer of meaning, but roll on, line after line, in waves and billows of sound, as unfathomable as to any sense they may contain as the ocean itself.

One cannot help fancying from time to time, as one reads, that Blake, who had a keen and deep perception of musical harmonies, found pleasure in the mere roll and movement of sonorous periods, and that these translated themselves in some way into meanings hidden from the vulgar and uninitiate, and only appreciable to the finer spiritual apprehension of those in a similar key of imaginative susceptibility. Only on some such hypothesis can we account for entire passages of the *Jerusalem*, explicable by no system of symbolism.

As to the general intention and purpose of the poem—for poem it undoubtedly is, albeit much of it

is written in the baldest prose—it must be regarded as an allegory in which the fall of the Giant Albion, in whom is typified the human race, or that portion of it from which the “chosen people” sprang, from his original state of spiritual purity and perfection, and his struggles to regain that eminence, are shadowed forth, dimly enough for the most part, it must be confessed, but with a fiery faith and a zeal of conviction, that redeem almost the dullest and most meaningless parts from utter nullity and rejection. But in the working-out of this theme we have the old subjects re-handled—“love without law and against law, virtue that stagnates into poisonous dead matter by moral isolation, sin that must exist for the sake of being forgiven, forgiveness that must always keep up with sin—must even maintain sin that it may have something to keep up with and to live for”—in the eloquent words of Mr. Swinburne.

In the carrying out of the poem, we behold the same wild hurtle of states, forces, and principles personified as human beings or demons that meet us in the other poems, albeit on a much wider and more extensive, and, it must be added, chaotic scale. The old demonic forms reappear, while to these are added other equally shadowy beings, as well as some that cannot even be called shadowy, being mere names, as in the following lines, which aptly illustrate the devout spirit in which the poet wrote, the lofty aims he set before him, and the too frequent empty clangour of words with which his purpose is accompanied and obscured.

“ Trembling I sit by day and night ; my friends are astonished at me,
Yet they forgive my wanderings. I rest from my great task
To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes
Of Man inwards, into the Worlds of Thought, into Eternity,
Ever expanding in the Bosom of God the Human Imagination.
O Saviour, pour upon me the spirit of meekness and love !
Annihilate the selfhood in me ! Be thou all my life !
Guide thou my hand, which trembles exceedingly upon the
Rock of Ages,
While I write of the building of Golgonooza, and of the
terrors of Entuthon,
Of Hand, and Hyle, and Coban, of Kwantok, Peachey,
Brereton, Slayd and Hutton ;
Of the terrible sons and daughters of Albion and their
generations.
Scofield, Kox, Kotope, and Bowen, revolve most mightily
upon
The furnaces of Los, before the eastern gate bending their
fury.
They war to destroy the furnaces, to desolate Golgonooza,
And to devour the sleeping humanity of Albion in rage and
hunger.”

Dark as much of this is, it is light itself in comparison with a vast deal that follows ; but even in places where the thought is obscured through the prophet's mysticism, we may see a clear enough meaning, as in the following :

“ I see the four-fold man, the humanity in deadly sleep,
And its fallen Emanation, the Spectre and its cruel
Shadow ;
I see the Past, Present, and Future, existing all at once

Before me. O Divine Spirit, sustain me on thy wings,
That I may awake Albion from his long and cold repose ;
For Bacon and Newton, sheathed in dismal steel, their
terrors hang
Like iron scourges over Albion. Reasonings like vast
serpents
Enfold around my limbs, bruising my minute articula-
tions."

Bacon, Newton, and Locke ever stand, in their scientific reasonings, opposed, in Blake's mind, to the growth of spiritual light and spiritual truth. Whatever their individual beliefs, he perceived that their systems lead to the negation of things spiritual. To teach this, that in systems of morality and in human reasonings is death, that in faith alone and in the intuitive promptings of the soul is life, namely, the true life in unity with God, constitutes the primary aim of the poem. In the Saviour's "Mild Song," with which the first chapter opens, this union is thus enforced :

"I am not a God afar off ; I am a brother and friend ;
Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me ;
Lo ! we are one ; forgiving all evil ; not seeking recom-
pense."

Perhaps we ought to regard *Jerusalem* as the last annunciation of that new Evangel which the prophet held that he was sent to preach. It may some day be worth while setting it forth in full, but here it is only possible to extract a few leading thoughts. In one place he says : "Jehovah's salvation is in the con-

tinual forgiveness of sins ;” for “ sin is but a little error and fault that is soon forgiven ; but mercy is not a sin, nor pity, nor love, nor kind forgiveness.” Pity and love and forgiveness are everywhere inculcated. “ Love and pity are the same, a soft repose, inward complacency of soul, a self-annihilation.” “ Whom should I pity if I pity not the sinner who has gone astray ? ” Then consider the ethical doctrine contained in this sentence : “ If I could find these criminals, I could not dare to take vengeance ; for all things are so constructed and builded by the Divine hand, that the sinner shall always escape, and He who takes vengeance is alone the criminal of Providence ; if I should dare to lay my finger on a grain of sand in way of vengeance, I punish the already punished.”

In the introduction to the third chapter, those who think otherwise than this are accused of worshipping Satan. “ Where are those who worship Satan under the name of God ? Where are they ? Listen ! Every religion that preaches vengeance for sin is the religion of the enemy and avenger, and not of the Forgiver of Sin, and their God is Satan, named by the Divine Name.” The austere prophet has like condemnation for those who profess beneficence in a general way. “ He who would do good to another must do it in minute particulars ; general good is the plea of the scoundrel, hypocrite, and flatterer.”

In the same chapter we have the subject of Divine forgiveness referred to again, and in a still more beautiful and striking manner. Jehovah shows to

Jerusalem, in vision, "Joseph, the carpenter, in Nazareth, and Mary, his espoused wife." Mary asks, "If thou put me away from thee, dost thou not murder me?" To which Joseph answers, "Should I marry a harlot and an adulteress?" To this Mary replies :

" Art thou more pure
Than thy Maker, who forgiveth sins, and calls again her that
is lost?
Though she hates, he calls her again in love. I love my dear
Joseph ;
But he driveth me away from his presence ; yet I hear the
voice of God
In the voice of my husband. Though he is angry for a
moment, he will not
Utterly cast me away. If I were pure never could I taste
the sweets
Of the forgiveness of sins ; if I were holy I never could be-
hold the tears
Of love of him who loves me in the midst of his anger in fur-
nace of fire."

Then Joseph answers :

" I heard his voice in my sleep and his angel in my dream,
Saying, Doth Jehovah forgive a debt only on condition that
it shall
Be paid ? Doth he forgive pollution only on condition of
purity ?
That debt is not forgiven ! that pollution is not forgiven !
Such is the forgiveness of the gods, the moral virtues of the
Heathen, whose tender mercies are cruelty. But Jehovah's
salvation
Is without money and without price in the continual for-
giveness of sins,
In the perpetual mutual sacrifice in great eternity."

This doctrine of the need of eternal sacrifice is again referred to later on. "If God dieth not for man, and giveth not Himself eternally for man, man could not exist, for man is love, as God is love. Every kindness to another is a little death in the Divine image; nor can man exist but by brotherhood."

Not to all this strange prophet's views can one give equal credence. Howbeit, one would like to see that Beulah

"Where every female delights to give her maiden to her husband :

The female searches sea and land for gratification of the Male genius, who in return clothes her in gems and gold, And feeds her with the food of Eden."

Although the poet tells us that this rule obtains in Beulah, which is a sort of ideal state, yet he does not favour the predominance of the "female will." "What may man be?" he exclaims. "Who can tell? But what may woman be—to have power over man from cradle to corruptible grave? There is a throne in every man, it is the throne of God: this woman has claimed as her own and man is no more. Oh, Albion! why wilt thou create a female will?" Let those who can explain this deep saying to their satisfaction.

No one, perhaps, can have read thus far in Blake without perceiving that he cannot always be taken *au pied de la lettre*; in other words, that there is sometimes a touch of perversity in what he says, and that he takes especial delight in a bold paradox.

In the first book we have a marvellous description of the building of Golgonooza, the mythical city, which is at once a glorified London and the city of inspired art and manufacture. In it, likewise, is typified the growth in man of that spiritual state which signifies redemption from bondage. This "terrible eternal labour" is thus sung:—

"What are those golden builders doing? Where was the
burying-place
Of soft Ethinthus near Tyburn's fatal tree? Is that
Mild Zion's hills, most ancient promontory, near mournful
Ever-weeping Paddington? Is that Calvary and Golgotha?
Becoming a building of pity and compassion? Lo!
The stones are pity, and the bricks well-wrought affections,
Enamelled with love and kindness, and the tiles engraven
gold,
Labour of merciful hands; the beams and rafters are for-
givenness;
The mortar and cement of the work, tears of honesty; the
nails
And the screws and iron braces are well-wrought blandish-
ments,
And well-contrived words, firm fixing, never forgotten,
Always comforting the remembrance; the floors, humility;
The ceilings, devotion; the hearths, thanksgiving.
Prepare the furniture, O Lambeth, in thy pitying looms!
The curtains, woven tears and sighs, wrought into lovely
forms
For comfort; there the secret furniture of Jerusalem's
chamber
Is wrought."

Gilchrist notes a resemblance to Bunyan in the quaint felicity of the homely, familiar things chosen

as symbols in this description of the "spiritual fourfold London." Many other points of resemblance might be indicated between the republican Blake and the Puritan tinker; many also to one at the opposite pole of thought—Walt Whitman, of whom, when the poet gets to stringing names together, we are often reminded. But there are other points of similarity betwixt these two. Possibly the link connecting all three is to be found in a common inspiration—the Hebrew Bible. For wide as their views are asunder on many matters, they had each drunk deeply at that fountain, and had unconsciously adopted its language and its metaphors for the utterance of their thoughts and the communication of their fiery zeal.

At times we trace something more than an inspiration; and in this description of the building of Golgonooza we have a reminiscence of Ezekiel's vision of "the city of the South," with its gates and courts and interminable measurements. Perplexing, almost maddening, in its apparent inextricable confusion, with its fourfold divisions, its quadruple points, its four gates, each with its four beasts or cherubim, its genii, nymphs, fairies, etc., it is yet so knit and welded together by the modern mystic's glowing and shaping imagination that the account of the Hebrew prophet becomes tame and colourless in comparison with his fiery splendours.

The idea of the spiritual city here embodied runs through the warp and woof of the poems to the end. In it is light and freedom and redemption, while all around "lies the land of death eternal—a land of

pain and misery and despair and ever-brooding melancholy." But all through the reader is involved in such a tangle of thought, imagery, and gnomic utterances, that he is like one groping his way in a darkling labyrinth, encountering, however, here and there a pearl, and here and there a gem of such translucent beauty, that he is encouraged to go on in hope. Thus, from time to time he comes upon such passages as the following :

" I behold London, a human, awful wonder of God !
He says, Return, Albion, return ! I give myself for thee.
My streets are my ideas of imagination.
Awake, Albion, awake ! and let us awake together.
My houses are thoughts ; my inhabitants, affections ;
The children of my thoughts, walking within my blood-
vessels,
Shut from my nervous form, which sleeps upon the verge
of Beulah
In dreams of darkness, while my vegetating blood in veiny
pipes
Rolls dreadful through the furnaces of Los and the mills of
Satan.
For Albion's sake, and for Jerusalem thy Emanation
I give myself, and these my brethren give themselves for
Albion."

What a wonder is this city of God's, this Golgonooza, this London, is further manifest from the sculptured adornments and pictured writings of its churches and walls.

" All things on earth are seen in the bright sculptures of
Los's Hall. And every age renews its powers from these
works,

With every pathetic story possible to happen from Hate or
Wayward Love. And every sorrow and distress is carved
here ;
Every affinity of parents, marriages, and friendships are
here
In all their various combinations ; wrought with wondrous
art,
All that can happen to man in his pilgrimage of seventy
years."

All that has existed in the space of six thousand
years, we are told, is permanent and not lost.

" And every little act,
Word, work, and wish that have existed, all remaining still
In those churches, ever consuming and ever building by the
spectres
Of all the inhabitants of earth waiting to be created ;
Shadowy to those who dwell not in them, mere possibilities ;
But to those who enter into them, they seem the only sub-
stances.
For everything exists ; and not one sigh, nor smile, nor tear,
One hair, nor particle of dust, not one can pass away."

Each of the chapters has a preface in which some
notable doctrine is set forth. That to the fourth is
the clearest in its statement of principles and the
most eloquent in its method of presentation. "Im-
agination," the prophet there says, repeating one of
his central truths, is "the real and eternal World, of
which the Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow,
and in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imagina-
tive bodies when these vegetable or mortal bodies are
no more." He knows of no other Christianity, and

of no other Gospel than the liberty of both body and mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination. Nor did the Apostles know of any other. "Is the Holy Ghost any other than an intellectual fountain?" he asks. "And the treasures of Heaven which we are to lay up, what are they but mental studies and performances? Are not the gifts of the Spirit everything to man, who must worship God, who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth? What is the joy of Heaven but improvement in the things of the Spirit? And what are the pains of Hell but ignorance, bodily lust, and idleness and devastation of the things of the Spirit? Answer this to yourselves," he continues, "and expel from among you those who pretend to despise the labours of art and science, which alone are the labours of the Gospel." Then we are told that "he who despises and mocks a mental gift in another mocks Jesus the giver of every mental gift." Heretical, all, to the last degree, but nobly and eloquently expressed, and with the fiery zeal of a prophet.

Hereupon follows the vision of a wheel of fire surrounding all the heavens, going from west to east, against the current of creation, and devouring all things in its flaming course. It is the wheel of religion, the devouring sword turning every way. Jesus died because he strove against its current. It is natural religion. But Jesus is the bright preacher of life, "creating Nature from this fiery law by self-denial and forgiveness of sin."

"Go, therefore, cast out devils in Christ's name;
Heal thou the sick of spiritual disease;

Pity the evil, for thou art not sent
To smite with terror and with punishments
Those that are sick
But to the publicans and harlots go ;
Teach them true happiness ; but let no curse
Go forth out of thy mouth to blight their peace ;
For Hell is opened to Heaven ; thine eyes behold
The dungeons burst and the prisoners set free."

Here follow three stanzas of choral melody, beginning :

" England ! awake ! awake ! awake ! "

and announcing the final resurrection of Albion to spiritual life :

" And now the time returns again ;
Our souls exult, and London towers
Perceive the Lamb of God to dwell
In England's green and pleasant bowers."

The passage describing the death of Albion, "slain in dreams of chastity and moral law," is lurid with magnificence. His corpse lies on the cold rock ; storms and snows beat round him ; howling winds cover him ; roaring seas dash furious against him ; in the deep darkness broad lightnings glare, long thunders roll, the weeds of death enwrap his hands and feet ; over them the famished eagle screams on bony wings, and around them howls the wolf of famine.

But "Time was finished." The Breath Divine went forth over the morning hills, and Albion arose.

Into the heavens he walked, clothed in flames, "loud thundering, with broad flashes of flaming lightning and pillars of fire, speaking the words of Eternity." Then Jesus appears to him in the likeness and similitude of Time, and we have the gospel of mutual love and brotherhood, and of the deliverance of all from death to eternal life chanted in a strain of passionate and almost ecstatic fervour. It thus ends :

"Awake ! Awake ! Jerusalem ! O lovely emanation of
Albion !

Awake and overspread all nations as in ancient time,
For lo ! the night of death is past and the eternal day
Appears upon our hills ! Awaken, Jerusalem, and come
away !"

This glorious resurrection includes all things, "tree, metal, earth, and stone," as well as human forms which—

"living, going forth, and returning wearied,
Into the planetary lives of years, months, days and hours ;
reposing
And then awakening into his bosom in the life of Immortality."

So ends this strange scripture, which we must regard as the most marvellous of all the poet produced. Equally marvellous are the designs with which it is adorned, and wherewith its myths and allegories are illustrated and enforced. For frontispiece we have the figure of a man stepping through a half-opened door, out of time into eternity as one imagines, and as he gazes, lighting himself into the vast darkness by

the gleam of a planet which he holds in his hand, he is struck all a-shudder with awe. Similarly noble and striking are most of the other illustrations, albeit they do not so easily lend themselves to interpretation. Like the man with the planetary lamp, we seem to have left behind the things known of time, and to be lost in regions of vast space amid the chaos and first beginnings of things, where we see the workshop of suns and moons, where the stars are still waiting to be hurled forth into space, and where the wheels of the boundless mechanical universe are seen black and bare, and the roots of all things lie uncovered and "ghast." Words are powerless to describe or to convey any, even the faintest notion of the weird imagination displayed in many of these designs. They are like nothing that was ever conceived before or since. For the most part noble, and full of a sublime and mystical meaning, some, nevertheless, border on the grotesque, as in the case of the human figure with swan's head and wings, or the eagle-headed creature, seated upon a rock, watching the sinking sun. One of the most impressive is that representing a huge Druid trilith upon a barren waste, beneath which pigmy-like men are gazing upwards to a sky broken with twisted bars of cloud and illumined by the crescent moon. This is the most peaceful or home-like of the designs ; others are monstrous or enigmatic to the last degree. Lovers embrace in an open water-lily ; women lie coiled with serpents, or, winged, spring upwards in rapt flight ; human beings, agonising, writhe in dense volumes

of flame ; death and torture in every form and shape alternate with men and women, who, with yearning, upturned gaze, climb and reach heavenwards. Here and there a more legible picture meets the eye—youth leading crutched age to the grave, the creation of Eve, or the soul soaring, winged and beatific, above its prostrate earthly body. But soon we grope darkling again amid insoluble enigmas, encountering now a winged ark upon a desolate sea, now human-faced bulls yoked to the plough or to a chariot, the wheels and shafts whereof are serpents, and now the corpse of a woman stretched upon a wave-washed rock, over which is poised, eager-eyed, almost piteous, a gigantic bird with bat-like wings. In truth, whether we consider it from the side of its art or its poesy, the Prophecy presents a maze of enigmas and problems caught up, as it were, out of the depths and darkness of eternity, and left, when all is said and done, save for a light here and a gleam there, still impenetrably wrapped in their original mystery and gloom.

I have not in these pages attempted to deal with Blake's art, except in so far as it constitutes a part of his literature ; but before coming to a close, it may be well to say that, in judging of the products of his brush, as of his pen, it behoves us to consider the limitations put upon him by his opportunities. The charge is frequently brought against him that he was not able to draw ; but as a matter of fact he could draw as well as any man of his time. We have abundant material in proof of this. But he was unfortunate,

in the first place, in being apprenticed to a man like Basire, whose style of engraving was hard and dry and conventional, the result being to cramp and fetter the genius of the pupil. In the second place, a great deal of the technique of painting he had to find out for himself. Where other men had instruction and guidance, he had none ; while they were gaining knowledge of methods and facility of treatment, he was spending years of solitary toil in ecclesiastical edifices.

The significance of the time thus spent can hardly be over-estimated as regards the working out of his genius. It kindled in him a fervent love of the Gothic spirit, which remained with him to the end, and, doubtless, as his principal biographer has noted, fostered "the romantic turn of his imagination" and his "natural affinities for the spiritual in art." But while it did this, it rooted in him some of his worst mannerisms. In short, though it strengthened, if it did not actually create, in him that leaning towards the gloomy and supernatural, the moral and religious, in art which characterised his genius, it caused him to become indifferent to execution and finish. In his art, as in his writings, form was nothing ; the thought was everything. If the conception were fully set forth, the rest was of little moment. In other words, he held that the power to conceive or invent a work carried with it that of adequately executing it.

His central idea, both as regards poetry and art, is essentially the same. "Shall painting," he asks, "be confined to the sordid drudgery of *fac-simile* repre-

sensation of merely mortal and perishing substance, and not be, as poetry and music are, elevated into its own proper sphere of invention and visionary conception? No, it shall not be so. Painting, as well as poetry and music, exists and exults in immortal thoughts."

In these words are contained the vitalising principle that underlay all Blake's work. In art his aim was not merely to excite and satisfy the æsthetic sense; it was to move and instruct—to elevate the soul above its mundane surroundings—to create a desire for that life of the imagination in which alone "all things exist." If that end were accomplished, all was accomplished.

In short, as I have already pointed out, his aim was largely and chiefly literary: it was to point a moral—to illustrate a theme, and that theme the grandest and noblest. This is the primary object of all great art; subsidiary thereto is the object of creating a sensation of pleasure, similar to what we experience in seeing a beautiful thing in nature, an exquisite harmony of colour, a bit of perfect form, a sentiment in light and shade.

Sometimes Blake neglected this secondary aim in his zeal for the first. But how well he could compass it if he liked we may see by turning to any of his earlier, and some of his later, illustrated and illuminated books. There we not only have his story told, but the emotion of beauty stirred, now by his fine perception of form, now by his tender feeling for colour.

In all this, however, he did no better than other

men have done; often, indeed, he fell short of his own previous achievement. But in one respect he has had no equal. It would be hard to find a better word to specify the quality in question than that which he applied to his designs for the *Book of Job*, namely, "Inventions." His faculty of invention was supreme. Such was his originality and fecundity in this respect that he was not only held to be good to steal from by the men of his own day, but ever since artists have found him suggestive and worthy of careful study.

It has frequently been pointed out that in some of his works there are indications of his having taken ideas from others. That is undoubtedly true; but the plagiarism, if plagiarism it can be called, was unconscious, and he adds thereto so many ideas of his own as practically to make the whole new. This is especially the case with his "Last Judgment," which is undoubtedly based on Michael Angelo's.

But when all has been said, it remains for ever true that as regards what is commonly known as creative work, in that, namely, wherein the imagination reigns supreme, there have been few to equal and none to excel Blake among our English artists. Though his drawing be faulty, and faulty much of his method and handling, these may be forgotten and forgiven in the grandeur and sublime pathos of most, if not all, of his purely imaginative work.

In this, as in his writing, it is important to note the effect of his imperfect education. But it is important also to note that this lack of education may have had its beneficial side both for himself and for us. For

sometimes it is well to leave the beaten track of custom and authority, or to have one strong in power and individuality do so, in order that we may from time to time be presented with glimpses of the reverse of the shield. We can never keep too much in mind, or have too strongly impressed upon us, the fact that there is another way of looking at a thing. Education, as we understand it, is too much a matter of filling the brain with the currently accepted or authoritative view of things; in other words, it is a stereotyping and too often a stultifying process, and makes a man as incapable of preserving a delicate perception of the truth as an already overcrowded photographic plate of receiving and giving back a fresh image.

Here was an unsophisticated mind revelling in the universe of things as it appeared to him. The phenomenon is so rare that the result cannot but be precious, especially when the medium of transmission is of the translucent purity of Blake. It is next to impossible to rise from a study of his works without a feeling amounting almost to a conviction that to him was given a vision of a world closed to the eyes of ordinary mortals. We may occasionally feel that the transmitted image is blurred, that the thought has often become confused, but we cannot doubt his sincerity. Every line he wrote was as it were infused with his own life's blood. He was literally consumed with earnestness, while the fire of his spirit burned itself into every jot and particle of the work he did.

Conscious that "the sea of time roars and follows swiftly," engulfing men, too often before their work is done, and that he has "spiritual enemies of formidable magnitude," who may tempt or turn him from his course; he, in his own phrase, roars and rages in the effort to get done what has been given him to do. "Nothing," he cries in his exultation, when he feels the stress and fervour of inspiration upon him—"Nothing can withstand the fury of my career among the stars of God and in the abysses of the accuser." And then, as it were in explanation and justification of his fiery zeal, he tells us the nature of his mission. "My mission is visionary—an endeavour to bring back the Golden Age." No wonder if, with such a mission and under such conditions, his thoughts are sometimes "scattered upon the winds in incoherent despair."

But notwithstanding the mass of what we must at present consider undigested verbiage in his prophetic poems, there still remains such an immensity of matter in them that one cannot pretend to examine, or even to state the whole of it in a treatise of this description. The fact that such is the case, and that it is so full of novel and startling thought, is almost enough in itself to indicate that he had struck some new vein or source of truth. That he believed himself to have been commissioned to deliver a message to mankind, as serious as that of Jonah, or of any other of the prophets, and that a terrible penalty attached to its non-fulfilment, is apparent not only from the passage previously noted, but from numberless others scattered through his writings.

In short, the more one studies these poems the more surely is one convinced that the writer had a purpose in view, and that that purpose was a very distinct and a very high and clear one. What strikes one with equal if not still greater force is that he for some reason failed to carry out his purpose with entire clearness and sanity. Before we have reached the end of his works the impression grows and strengthens upon us that his message is too great for him, that, as Hazlitt—profoundest of critics—said, “He is ruined by vain struggles to get rid of what presses on his brain ; he attempts impossibilities.”

No man in his day and generation—no man, perhaps, that ever stood on our English earth—struggled so hard to deliver the truth that was in him. How nigh his deliverance was to becoming a mere nullity and abortion we know ; and yet it was providentially saved from that ignominy. Through the smoke and vapour of his fiery effort, through the roaring and confused thunder of his wrathful spirit, we see the tongue of clear flame ascending—we hear the voice proclaiming. Thus was he enabled in some sort to deliver his message—possibly to deliver it fully—albeit the utterance was accompanied by so much tempestuous uproar, and such a wild rush of words, that one is at times almost deafened.

And the pity of it is that the more we study him the more we feel convinced that, had he been able to put into his work that crystalline freshness and lucidity which, after all, must still remain a chief characteristic of all supremely great writing, he would to-day have

stood side by side with the foremost in our literature, probably in all literatures. For in the splendour and magnitude of his imagination—it cannot too often be insisted—he has no superior; and though it is possible to point to his vast overplus of words utterly without meaning, except on some inane theory of magico-cabalistic mysticism, in proof of his insanity; yet, in spite of all, there burned through this incoherent windy drift, and for ever stands revealed as in golden letters of light, a treasury of thought so rich that it constitutes a veritable and almost unparalleled intellectual heritage for all the ages to come.

THE END.



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